[illegible] of Salt allowed [illegible] curing of fish in some cases too small; that inconvenience, however, might be remedied by an alteration of the law.

[illegible] whether the Salt laws have obstructed the fisheries, or prevented persons from engaging in them, it is perhaps difficult to ascertain: it is, however, very evident, that while a high duty is to be collected on Salt, the laws which relate to the use of that article duty-free cannot be materially altered, or safely relaxed.

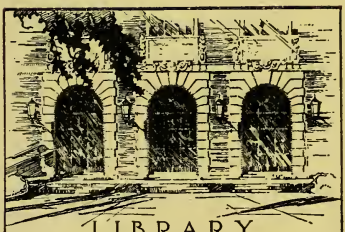
At the same time it must be admitted, that those laws neither are, nor can possibly be rendered, entirely effectual to the prevention of fraud.

In one part of the kingdom it has been found extremely difficult to apply the laws to the mode of using Salt in the cure of fish.

For preserving pilchard, the Salt is repeatedly applied, until it is become so foul and blended with extraneous matter, as to be fit only for manure; and after it has been once used and is mixed with fish scales, and other substances, it is impossible to distinguish the Salt, to ascertain the quantity, or to form any check upon the application or expenditure.

In the last Session of Parliament, an Act was passed for allowing Salt duty-free, until October next, for the cure of fish for home consumption, either in bulk or in barrels; and it is asserted, that considerable quantities of fish have in consequence thereof been [illegible] and brought to market in [illegible]

JOHN. WEST.
A.D. 1854.



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WHO IS THE BRIDEGROOM?

OR,

NUPTIAL DISCOVERIES.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By MRS. GREEN,

AUTHOR OF

GOOD MEN OF MODERN DATE, THE FUGITIVE, ROMANCE-READERS AND ROMANCE-WRITERS, REFORMIST, FESTIVAL OF ST. JAGO, CARTHUSIAN FRIAR, ROYAL EXILES, &c. &c.

She's a woman of a noble resolution. SIR JOHN VANBRUGH.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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1822.

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WHO IS THE BRIDEGROOM?

CHAPTER I.

Chitchat with a Dash of Scandal.

SEATED in a retired part of lady Ashton's drawing-room, on a small Persian seat of repose, sat Mr. Ayscough and the haughty idol of his affections. She appeared quite *il penseroso,* and her admirer seemed to be occupied in the arduous endeavour of putting her in good humour; and as the minutes proceeded in their swift career, her countenance, though pallid, seemed somewhat to brighten, and she listened, if not with

 pleasure,

at least with something like complacency.

In the knot of females which lady Ashton and lady Netterville hastened to join, was Sophia Ashton, who had, for a little while, recovered her spirits, and was as gay and sprightly as any of the party amongst whom she was seated. The ladies consisted of those that were young, as well as those arrived at middle age; they were all ladies of fashion, and all young and handsome enough to be admired, and to enjoy the pleasures and amusements of the gay world.—"Oh! here comes lady Netterville!" was the general cry, as that lady approached—"now we shall hear something new."

Ayscough, on Miss Ashton's rising and quitting his side, to help to form the circle round this modish gossip, with the rest of the visitors, who had before been scattered in pairs and trios about the apartment, took his leave, having an unconquerable dislike, not only to the *eyes* of lady Netterville,

terville, as we recorded in a former chapter, but to her slanderous tongue; and not all the entreaties of lady Ashton for his stay had any avail: he looked, it is true, very often towards her, who, with one kind and requesting glance, would have rivetted him to the spot, however unpleasant his situation; but she remained impenetrable, and never cast her eyes towards him.

Lady Netterville began with her usual exclamation of—"Well! is it not a strange business, that sudden flight of lady Diana Wentworth to Lisbon?"

"Her ladyship's declining health," remarked Sophia, "I should have supposed to have been the cause."

"Then I suppose too," said the tattling lady Netterville, "that sir Lucius Torrington has taken out a diploma, and is gone to attend his favourite as head-physician; for he, it seems, has followed her."

"What! sir Lucius gone!" exclaimed every belle of fashion. "When, where,

how?—I am sure I saw him only five days ago."

"Very possibly," said lady Netterville, "as he only set off the day before yesterday. He was at Tunbridge when his masculine favourite took her departure; and calling at her ladyship's house, to request her company in his curricle, to try a pair of fine blood-mares, he found she had galloped off herself, without bit or bridle. He ran home like a madman, travelled post, day and night, to Falmouth; and is, I dare say, by this time, on board the Lisbon packet—and I know the wind is fair."

"Oh!" said Miss Ashton, laughing, "let lady Netterville alone for finding out every minutia of what is going on in fashionable life! However, I must say I am sorry that there are two bright masquerade characters out of the way."

"Oh, it is really lamentable!" said lady Netterville. "As to my dear friend, the duchess of Arlington, she is almost out of her

her wits about it. I should have been obliged to have passed the whole day with her, to have heard her complaints, and to have made use of all my best powers of consolation; but ever since three, I have been engaged with my friend, Mrs. Horton. I was present, at that hour, at the wedding of Miss Hawthorn, Mrs. Horton's former companion. She is married to the rich Mr. Carrington—what a match for her! She's a lucky one, it must be confessed, though, between friends, not over *virtuous*, I believe."

Sophia had listened attentively to lady Netterville's commenced account of the wedding of her friend; but her confusion was extreme, as her mother, she saw, was regarding her with that severity which generally diffused itself over her countenance, whenever Elinor Hawthorn was mentioned, especially as her mother now audibly exclaimed—" I don't care—I always speaks my mind; and I say she's a

good-for-nothing nasty hussey, let who will have married her."

"Well," said lady Netterville, "overacting the *virtuous* character she wished to preserve, and forgetting all her own former lapses from chastity, she topped her part finely—she affected to blush, and to look as maidenly as innocence itself."

"Hang *sitch* husseys!" said lady Ashton, again glancing at the trembling Sophia.

"I suppose," said Miss Ashton, "though it was a private wedding, it was splendid."

"Oh, in the extreme!—why she is married to the *rich* Mr. Carrington." Here lady Netterville looked round, to see how her intelligence concerning this gentleman was received, and she resolved to square her behaviour concerning him accordingly; for, provided she could maintain her footing in the fashionable world, she cared not whom she sacrificed, whether friend or foe; and she saw a sneer on the counte-

nance

nance of more than one lady in the company.—" Dear me!" resumed she, " such presents — such exquisite diamonds, as were given to the bride. The father too gave her a complete set of the finest pearls I ever beheld."

" Oh!" said Sophia, speaking from the impulse of her kind heart, " do tell me, lady Netterville—has her father quite forgiven her?"

" I wish, Sophy, you would be quiet, and not interrupt lady Netterville," said lady Ashton.

Silence being then observed, the scandal-monger of Russell-square continued her narrative.—" That Hawthorn's a brute, however; though, to be sure, when an only daughter does disgrace her family, by swerving from the rules of virtue, there is some excuse for an obdurate father; but the ill-natured fellow would not kiss her when she took her leave, and seemed, poor thing! to expect it; and when he cordially shook hands with her

husband, he contrived to evade touching the hand of his daughter."

"What time of the day was she married?" asked a young lady.

"At three o'clock in the afternoon precisely, by special licence, and the dean of —— performed the ceremony."

Lady Ashton laughed heartily, and said —"His *deanship* is come to *purfurment*, I think."

Lady Netterville pretended not to hear her, but went on.—"After the ceremony, the couple immediately set off on their journey in a handsome postchariot-and-four, and to-morrow they will embark for India."

"Ah!" said one of the quality-visitors, "this Carrington is some one, I suppose, who has acquired a fortune in the East, Heaven knows how!—I never heard of the *rich Mr. Carrington*."

"I had a footman of that name once," said old lady Sarah Crofton, "who, I suspected, robbed me of some valuables. He went

went to India soon afterwards, and I heard by accident that he was making a fortune."

"I should not wonder, my lady," said the accommodating Netterville, "if it was the same man. I know he did not acquire *all* his fortune in the East; though, I believe, he took care to crib a pretty deal from Mrs. Horton, whose affairs in India he used to manage, and whose creature he is."

"I can't abide that Mrs. Horton," said lady Ashton; "she is so bold and so envious, that I call her *Moll Violent*, for my part."

"It would be a good nickname," said one lady, laughing heartily, "if Mrs. Horton's name was *Mary*, and if she did not appear one of the most easy good-natured women breathing. If she is envious, she has the art of concealing it under the semblance of wishing well to every one."

"And as I am sure, mamma," said Miss Ashton, "the present company do

not know to what you allude when you gave Mrs. Horton that appellation, between ourselves, it was as well to be silent on the trifling latitude of nonsense we are too apt to allow ourselves in private."

Lady Ashton was again silenced, to the confusion of her accomplished daughters; and lady Netterville, at the request of the company, proceeded—"Through Mrs. Horton's interest, and much money expended in bribes well-timed, Mr. Carrington has now obtained a very considerable and lucrative place at M——; and he has got a very pretty wife, who knows as well as any one how to behave herself; but as for him, he is a low-born, disagreeable fellow—absolutely nobody."

Lady Netterville had long forgotten Whitechapel, and the butcher's shop, over which she drew her first breath: now, though lady Ashton never forgot *her* origin, she chose too always to be silent about it; but then she never made obscurity of birth a subject of reproach, but she

she took care now to change the topic, and said—" Well, well, what with some sly girls, and young ladies of quality, as is as bold as *she-dragoons*, I declare I am almost ashamed of my own *sect*."

" Ay, ay," said the quick-conceiving lady Netterville, " I know who your ladyship alludes to very well; and indeed she is as bold as what you say. No dragoon on horseback, I am sure, ever equalled lady Diana Wentworth, when she is mounted on a blood-mare, and is seen dashing through Hyde-park, in a way which astonishes one to think how she escapes without breaking her neck."

" I have had a thousand different opinions in my mind," said one lady, " concerning her great intimacy with sir Lucius Torrington. Often I have thought that it only proceeded from their great similarity of taste, and their mutual love of notoriety; for I always believed that she regarded her intended husband, the accomplished and handsome young marquis

of Rainsbury, with peculiar interest and a marked partiality."

"But his lordship," remarked lady Ashton, "is so very different from the *barrowknight*, that no one *can* like *both*; and sir *Luscious* and lady Diana are quite *congealed* souls, as my Betsy calls them."

"I never called them so in my life," said Miss Ashton, who rather disliked lady Diana, "for I think the four-in-hand noble pair much more given to *thaw*."

"True," said lady Netterville, "I am sure they are of a more melting than a freezing temperament."

Lady Ashton found she had said something wrong; and as she softly said—"Come, don't let us be getting *scurrylous*," she looked at her youngest daughter, who often kindly and delicately got her mother out of a scrape; and Sophia now, with much sweetness and a forced laugh, said—"I know nothing about the metaphor, good ladies, of *frost* or *thaw*, when applied to these two members of high

high fashion; but I do think, with mamma, that they really *are* congenial souls."

This filial instance of kindness turned the attention from lady Ashton's blunder to the charming speaker; and—"Well, I say nothing," issued from the censorious lips of many a modern Mrs. Candour.

One lady of quality exclaimed—"I never had my doubts respecting the intimacy between sir Lucius Torrington and lady Diana Wentworth; their behaviour was so glaring, so totally incorrect, that the earl of Pyrwater must be the most depraved of men, to wish a match between lord Rainsbury and lady Diana now to take place; and the haste sir Lucius made after her ladyship, who very smugly went off first, attended only by her confidential maid-servant, puts the matter beyond the shadow of a doubt. I saw how it was; she actually began to look round, I thought, before she went."

"Oh, pardon me!" said lady Ashton; "there, my lady, you are certainly wrong; why

why the poor dissipated creature had got so thin, that she looked like two deal-boards clapped together, as my poor mother used to say."

"Yes," said lady Netterville; "but, my dear lady Ashton, do not I know, though dear sir George Netterville and I were bereaved of our fondest hope, every symptom attending that state in 'which women wish to be who love their lords?" Here a soft sigh made her tender affection for the late sir George Netterville pass current amongst this assembly, none of the members of which knew the early events in the life of the beauty of Mile-end.—"The cheeks," continued the scandal-monger, "fall in—so did those of lady Diana; the eyes are hollow, and the lips and complexion have exactly that livid hue approaching to yellow, which has been, for some weeks, perceptible in her ladyship.—Ay, ay," added she, as she looked towards the handsome daughters of lady Ashton, "there are many things

not

not dreamt of, in regard to one-half of the population of the gay world, even among the most modest and cherished of the female members of fashion—I beg pardon, ladies—I should have said, *apparently* the most modest."

The blush on Sophia's cheek now rivalled the colour of the damask-rose; and this her confusion was noticed by no one but lady Netterville, though the sarcasm she had just uttered was not intended for Sophia.

"Ay, ay," said the pretty and remarkably-*fair* Miss Westall, who was always employed in drawing admirers of her beauty, by descanting on her want of it, "I am sunburnt, and may sit down in a corner, as Beatrice says, and cry, 'Heigho for a husband!' Now here is the masculine lady Diana Wentworth, who sets the whole world at defiance, and of whom, if I was a man, I should actually be afraid; but no sooner does she set off on a wild-goose chase, but after her pursues the affianced

affianced husband of this four-in-hand dame; the handsomest nobleman about town flies after her, as swift as posthorses could carry him; and not only he, but—the capricious, neglectful, indifferent creature, yet the decided man of fashion, it must be owned—he too rattles over the pavement, and through the dusty road, to catch the haughty fair one—if to catch her is amongst the chapter of possibilities."

"What!" said lady Crofton, "did lord Rainsbury go after lady Diana Wentworth? But, most likely, his uncle sent him."

"That I dare aver," said lady Netterville, "especially as lord Rainsbury jogged along his sleeveless errand, like a man already married, and passed the whole time he rambled into Devonshire from Cornwall—lady Ashton, guess how."

"Nay," said lady Ashton, "I never was a good hand at guessing any thing in my life; and it is Betsy and Sophy as finds

finds out all the *nignamees* and *chairheads*."

"Why then, if you will not guess," said lady Netterville, "I will tell you. The marquis of Rainsbury, when he found his dear wife-elect gone, God knows where (and certainly on some mysterious business), his lordship behaved, notwithstanding all that sentimentality for which he is so famous, like all other modern husbands. He amused himself as well as he could; but his chief delight was in wandering over lady Ashton's charming house, park, and gardens, instead of going forth, like a valiant knight, after the lady whom he will soon vow to love alone; and, above all others, he became the stout champion of lady Ashton's virtue, and of the beauty and accomplishments of her daughters, in the stagecoach which brought him from Bath to London."

"We are much obliged, I am sure," said lady Ashton, "to his lordship for his good opinion."

"Yes,"

"Yes," said Miss Ashton; "but neither my mother or we wish to have our praises trumpeted forth among the low passengers of a stagecoach."

"Oh! but," said lady Netterville, "I was told also, from very good authority, that there were only four inside-passengers, and they were of the highest respectability. Among them was a Mrs. Sancroft, who boasted, it seems, of having educated a Sophia Ashton, as the good mistress of the birch chose to express herself."

"Excellent woman!" said Sophia, "her praise is indeed an honour! May I ever, through life, deserve it, and endeavour to cultivate those excellent principles she engrafted in my young mind!"

"What an idea!" said the silly Miss Westall—"*mistress of the birch!* Oh! it is capital! I give you credit for that thought, lady Netterville. Did she ever inculcate her maxims by the rule of the birch, my dear Sophia, and enforce her doctrine

doctrine by old Solomon's, of 'Spare the rod, and spoil the child?"

"I do not," said Sophia, "give lady Netterville credit for the appellation she bestowed on a very elegant woman, who uses no coercion of any kind towards her pupils; and which appellation is so very commonplace, I wonder any one should think it original."

"And only recollect, ladies," said Miss Ashton, "that my little prudish sister sets more store by the praise of her prim governess, than on that of one of the most accomplished young noblemen of the present day."

The ladies all laughed, and the embarrassment of poor Sophia was very visible; but lady Ashton was not pleased, and she said—"Betsy, you know very well I does'n't like this; but you are so satirical, that though I know you have the truest *infection* for your sister, you cannot even spare her, nor yet your mother sometimes, to shew your own *larning*."

Now,

Now, though there was no learning required for Miss Ashton to make the above remark, yet she now shewed her *wisdom* by being silent; and the morning-hour sounding one, refreshments were handed round; and after a scrambling kind of *hunting* supper, the female "School for Scandal" separated, and retired to their different homes.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.

Incidents connected with some preceding Pages.

At the commencement of our first volume, we mentioned the illicit and violent love conceived by Mrs. Horton for Mr. Ayscough during the lifetime of her husband; and we also hinted at the revenge she had determined on, when she found his heart not only irrevocably given to another, but that it was an alien to herself.

The plot she laid was deep and cruel, as it would involve the innocent in its mischief, though that mischief had only one object. But what is there that will not be put in practice for self-gratification, by the sensual oppressor of the hum-

ble

ble and lowly—the unfeeling, rich female voluptuary, whose sole enjoyment centres in self; in the adornment of whose person, once beautiful, but now bloated with intemperance, was exhausted all that Asiatic pomp or European elegance could display; and who, while she was seated like a queen, and boasting she should see no sorrow, let the indigent depart without bounty, and never bestowed a tear on the sufferings of the wretched!

It will not be uninteresting to our readers, to give some account of the agents and assistants in the diabolical plot that was now forming in the fertile brain of the depraved Mrs. Horton. It is not to be supposed that a woman who could break through her marriage-vow, and could so far forget herself, and disgrace her sex, as to write an avowal of her love to a young man, almost a stranger to her, that she could be of such a temperament as to confine her roving inclinations to one object. Mrs. Horton was a female

libertine,

libertine, and as jealous and vindictive as she was meretricious and vain.

Among those adventurers to India, who resolve on getting money at any rate, and by any means, was a gentleman, who had with him a factotum—a kind of steward and attendant, who acted in the joint capacities of steward, gentleman, friend, and companion.

Richard Carrington, the above factotum, was a man who was not so foolish as to turn his hand from doing a profitable job, because the work was dirty or villainous. He went out very well fitted to India, from the produce of some plate and jewels belonging to a lady, where he had lived as footman; but as there was no proof, and the lady had an utter aversion to appear in a court of justice, and trembled at the bare idea of being the cause of a fellow-creature's death, however he might be unworthy, Carrington, therefore, like many other villains, escaped by a lenity truly

truly amiable, but which, like too much severity, is often the cause of much evil.

In his early youth, Mr. Carrington had studied the law, in the Temple Chambers of an eminent barrister, to whom he had served his clerkship, but from whom he was dismissed with disgrace, some time before he joined the knights of the rainbow. In the practice of the law he was of much use to his employer, with whom he went out to India, and also to himself, as it enabled him to get money very rapidly.

After the death of general Horton, he had the transacting of all Mrs. Horton's law-business, and was appointed her steward; he was also the depository of all her secrets, and in him she placed the most unlimited confidence.

Mrs. Horton had, in her early days of girlhood, before she became acquainted with the general, captivated the sensual and libertine Hawthorn, then a married man. He eagerly watched every occasion that

that would afford him an opportunity of seeing her, and was for ever throwing himself in her way. The giddy, but then innocent girl thought him a very handsome fellow, and was pleased with his admiration; but when she found he was a married man, she had no idea of him in the way of a lover; and, naturally fond of pomp, show, and idleness, she yielded to the advice of her parents, in becoming the wife of a wealthy general in the army, and lately appointed a governor in the East.

Soon after Mrs. Horton's interview with Mr. Ayscough in her boudoir, which we recounted in the commencement of our first volume, the fallen Miss Hawthorn, forsaken by her faithless seducer, advertised for a situation as companion to a lady. Mrs. Horton, who was in want of a tool, rather than a correct companion, took but little notice of the embarrassment evinced by Elinor Hawthorn, when she requested of her a respectable refer-

ence; but when, in the course of some desultory conversation, the unfortunate girl mentioned her being the particular bosom-friend of Miss Ashton, the dark eye of Mrs. Horton sparkled with delight. —" It is customary, I know," said she, " to be very particular on the score of references; but your appearance charms me —I am sure I must love you; we will say no more about it—I hate the trouble of going after such nonsense—come to me as soon as you can."

Thus every thing was settled, and Mrs. Horton found her *protégé* so apt, that she soon opened her heart to her—told her, without reserve, all she required of her, and found the lady as compliant as she could possibly wish.

His Satanic majesty, it seems, is not without his subordinate agents, which he sends forth to exercise his will and power over the hapless victims of his malevolence. Thus Mrs. Horton summoned all her auxiliaries; and after conquering, in the

the mind of Elinor, every little scruple that friendship for Sophia Ashton might cause to lag behind, she completely wrought on that always unprincipled girl to become the mere puppet of her will; and this was not to be wondered at in a girl of such a character, when it shall be known that Mrs. Horton made the most fervent promises, and which she certainly meant to, and actually did fulfil—namely, to obtain the forgiveness of Mr. Hawthorn for his fallen daughter, and also to provide her with a rich husband, provided she accompanied him abroad, which Mrs. Horton argued upon as to its propriety, and convinced Elinor that it would be much better for her, as there her former errors could never be known, and she would be at the head of the luxurious and high society in which it would be her lot to mingle.

Mr. Carrington, though he would have preferred a lady with a fortune, was so much the implicit slave to the will of his

wealthy and generous, or rather prodigal, patroness, that he was easily persuaded to lend his powerful hand to the dirty business in agitation, particularly, as through Mrs. Horton's interest he would be invested with a high and lucrative post at ——. He liked too the person and appearance of his future bride, whose oblique glances, studied manners, and artificial character, bespoke a kindred soul.

When this business was arranged, Mrs. Horton, who never studied either form or decorum, wrote a tender letter to Mr. Hawthorn, acquainting him that an old flame of his, now a widow, at her own disposal, and with a superabundance of wealth, wished to see him at her house in town, if he thought her worth his while to take a journey for. She added, that she had never been blind to his merits, and she now wished to prove the assertion.

Hawthorn had seen her handwriting before, and he easily recognised it again. He

He compared it with a note she had written to his late unhappy and injured wife, just before Mrs. Horton's departure for India; and he compared it also with a long-treasured-up valentine, which he knew had been sent by her, when a giddy girl.

He ordered posthorses, and repaired, on the wings of love, to her who was once the girl of his fondest choice; but when he beheld the change that a few years and intemperance had wrought in the form and countenance of the beautiful little creature he had formerly adored, he almost started. Yet her wealth was a temptation; and though he hated the matrimonial tie, yet he hoped to obtain her hand in the honourable way of marriage. He accordingly bridled his astonishment; and as he pressed her pretty little hand to his lips, he declared, as he fondly looked on that truly gentlewomanlike charm, that she was the same lovely creature as ever.

Mrs. Horton was, however, in her turn, surprised at the visible change in the person of the bottle-loving wealthy fox-hunter. She had at first a twofold motive in sending for him, for she recollected how handsome a man she had left him, and she happened at that time to be without any favoured lover: she now rather shrunk from the idea of rewarding him as she had intended, provided he consented to lend his assistance towards her plans. But flattery, dear flattery, was ever welcome to Mrs. Horton; and what he had said to her in compliment animated her countenance, and gave lustre to a pair of eyes, in which goodnature had always been the predominant expression. She was not also destitute of that outward attraction which generally pleases the depraved libertine, and Mr. Hawthorn again fancied himself deeply in love.

At the next visit, he made the wealthy widow an offer of his hand; at which she, with

with a loud laugh, that implied more levity than modesty, said, as Hawthorn burst into an impassioned exclamation on her pearly teeth—" My dear fellow, let us thank Heaven that we are now both at liberty to do as we please, and that we have, both of us, wealth enough to laugh at a world, whose suffrages are easily purchased. We have both borne the shackles of matrimony; we may now be bound together by the rosy bands of love, which either of us can break at pleasure."

Mr. Hawthorn clasped the yielding fair one to his bosom, who had just uttered sentiments so congenial with his own; but Mrs. Horton, with an assumed dignity, that never sat well upon her, pushed him from her; and the gentleman, as he regarded her, very passively retreated.

" My own Hawthorn!" resumed she, in a languishing kind of way, as she reclined on a Turkish divan, " you are too impetuous."

He was in an instant by her side, and tenderly pressing her hand.

"Hear me, my dear fellow," continued she; "I have much to say to you. Promise me solemnly, and that you will keep the promise faithfully, to perform two important acts, which I shall require of you; and though I am resolved never to marry, yet, if you will perform what I request, not only my person (mark me, on these conditions only), but my purse, shall be ever at your command."

Hawthorn urged that it was unjust to bind him to perform any act that he was previously unacquainted with the nature of; but the Eastern dame was peremptory, assuring him it was what he could very easily do, and that she would, on his compliance, devote herself to him, otherwise they never met again.

Blinded and driven on by that passion misnamed love, he promised faithfully to fulfil the commands of his mistress, be they

they what they would; and when he knew what they were, he joyfully subscribed to any thing that could in anywise injure the Ashtons, against whom he bore a most inveterate hatred. But he found it a very difficult task to forgive his daughter; and though he pretended he did so, no father's kind embrace comforted the wretched girl, on her departure from her native land, with a disagreeable husband, whom she could never love; and though her father bestowed on her a few bridal ornaments, not one farthing of portion did he give her, to ensure her some degree of happiness or consideration with a money-loving partner. He also, bad as he was himself, and cruel to an only child, shuddered at her seeming want of maternal tenderness, and felt ready to curse her for it.

In vain the immodest dame, of whom he was once so enamoured, and who had now become so lavish of her favours, that she had "fed him till he loath'd"—in vain did

she point out to him, after his daughter had sailed for India, that it was not want of maternal fondness, on her part, but what she could very well account for: he only cursed Mrs. Carrington bitterly for her duplicity, and himself heartily, for having been made her dupe.

The connexion between Mrs. Horton and Mr. Hawthorn was not likely to be permanent, and soon after, each cordially disliking the other, it finally terminated.

CHAP-

CHAPTER III.

The Masquerade.

We will now bid adieu to Mr. and Mrs. Carrington, and leave them to pursue their way over the briny ocean, while we repair to the splendid mansion of the duchess of Arlington, where velvet-moss carpets on the spacious staircases drowned the sound of the light footfall of the various and well-dressed throngs that kept pouring in, from the hour of eleven till two in the morning, the time appointed for unmasking, when the brilliant assemblage of beauty and fashion were to be seated at tables spread with every delicacy, forming a profuse, rare, and truly-elegant supper.

Ayscough, in the character of a Hindoo priest, was continually paying his atten-

tive adorations to the Indian goddess Rada, whom, from his earnest persuasions, Miss Ashton had consented to personate, and in which she really looked almost a divinity. Over her fine form floated the light and loose oriental robe, of the finest India muslin, over yellow sarsnet, and "doubled every charm it seem'd to hide," as a valuable amethyst brooch, set round with the finest pearls, clasped it modestly over her well-formed bust. Her long dark hair, breathing all the sweets of "Araby the bless'd," in the richness of the perfumes with which it was scented, was crowned by a wreath of lotos; and the jewel, so fashionable among the natives of Hindostan, hung over, or rather appeared as if fastened to, her snowy forehead. Her arms and wrists were adorned with golden chains, or rather bars of gold; and on her legs the tight buskin, of flesh-coloured silk, so well imitated the real hue of her fine skin, that it was a prodigy of art that might have been affirmed to be

nature

nature. Round her well-turned ancle was a bar of gold, clasped with a small silver lotos; and the *toute-ensemble* of her classical appearance, so well according with Eastern mythology, was owing all to the taste and judgment of Ayscough, on whom she that evening smiled with peculiar complacency, who felt then the happiest of men; for he had been so blessed as to gain that peculiar favour in the eyes of his beloved, that she had falteringly acknowledged, while "the mask of night was on her cheek," that she preferred him before all others of his sex; and this was the truth. His persevering affection—his manly, generous character—his fine person, and great mental endowments, had at length gained him an interest in the heart of this proud beauty; and lord Rainsbury was really banished from that heart which had once so ambitiously and partially beat for him: she now turned from him, for though his eyes dwelt on the delicate form of

of his loved Sophia, yet the lustre and grace diffused around by the Eastern goddess, made him join in the audible adoration offered by all the young men of fashion towards her; yet she turned from him, though he was the admiration of every female that evening in all the gay assembly, arrayed in the studied elegance and grandeur of his Neapolitan costume; and Miss Ashton saw none with partiality but her faithful Hindoo priest, in his simple habiliments.

Lady Ashton looked remarkably handsome, and even dignified, as a Roman matron; and fortunately, at the former part of the night, she spoke but little. Her sweet daughter, Sophia, as a Vestal virgin, looked lovely beyond description.

The family-party, so opposite in characteristic costume, paired off, though they kept each other in view: they were, alternately, continually assailed and followed by three masks, in curious disguises;

one

one of which formed the personification of TRUTH, the second that of OBSERVATION, and the third SEVERITY.

TRUTH, though possessed of an *embonpoint*, which did not allow of much display, was, notwithstanding the aid resorted to of flesh-coloured silk, rather too much approaching to the classical nudity of her character to be perfectly decorous. Nevertheless she proved herself a good masquerade character, and one who had been *au fait* to the mimic part, by having frequented foreign masquerades, so far superior, in life, spirit, and exactitude of personating character, to those in England. The sun on her breast, and the mirror in her hand, were continually flashing on the sight of the pretty Vestal virgin, to whom *Truth* said, in a disguised voice—" Recollect the foundation of Rome's splendid city; all are not virgins who watch the sacred fire."

" I do not represent the mother of Remus and Romulus," said Sophia, " but a more *modern* Vestal."

" Exactly

"Exactly so," said SEVERITY, in a voice of sternness, but which made Sophia start, for she fancied she had heard it before; then, after a pause, he added—"Such as you are, are most modern Vestals!"

OBSERVATION kept at that distance which enabled her to listen to all, without losing a word of what was uttered; while her dress had nothing in it very particular, except, that while it appeared sober, sad, and grave, a small part of it was curiously diversified.

Such were the two females of this curious trio. The male attendant who accompanied them in the character of SEVERITY, was of a form and stature approaching to the Herculean; but his march was slow, and he seemed to step with a degree of that pain he seemed desirous of inflicting. On the hilt of an Arabic dagger he wore by his side, called a *kreuise*, was engraven the sentence, "*I inflict;*" and on a scourge he held in his hand was inscribed, in large characters, "*Justice.*"

"*Justice.*" On the forehead of a hideous mask was written, "*Reproof to the Guilty.*"

Every one seemed to shudder as this mask approached them, and the Roman matron could keep silence no longer.—"I wonder," said she, "who those three queer *creters* be. I vow that ugly monster, that calls himself *Severity*, puts me quite in a flusteration, following one about just like *'t'Antony's* pig."

The Neapolitan took advantage of the laugh this brilliant masquerade sally excited, to tell Sophia that he knew her well, in spite of her disguise; he made himself also known to her, and requested to be favoured with her hand in the dance.

The incongruous mixture in a masquerade dance is certainly one of the most grotesque things in the motley scene: chimneysweepers and sultanas, female balladsingers and Moorish princes, nuns and harlequins, are there seen paired together, as if absurdity and contrariety were purposely

posely blended in the frenzied pageant of Folly's darling votaries.

Rada lost almost all her worshippers, for all thronged round the dancers, to watch the light, graceful, and agile movements of the enchanting Vestal and the graceful Neapolitan; even *Severity*, who appeared before so ferocious, stood transfixed in admiration. As to *Observation*, she appeared restless, and to be employed elsewhere; while *Truth* no longer insultingly, as before, held up her mirror, but gave assent to all who appealed to her, to affirm how peculiarly graceful were the steps, and how elegant the modest attitudes, of the Vestal virgin.

A friar of the Benedictine order conducted lady Ashton to a seat, and placed himself beside her.—"Chaste matron," said he, "Rome is fallen!"

"Oh, *Crimini!*" said her ladyship, looking up to the cieling, "I'm sure I hopes not! If I thought so, I'd go home directly; but I know there's nothing but humbug at

at a masquerade, and so I don't believe a word you say about the *room's falling*."

"You mistake me, chaste matron," said the friar; "I said, that since the days such chaste matrons as you flourished in the great city of Rome, that it has fallen in imagined splendour."

"Ho!" said lady Ashton, very attentively, but about what she could not tell.

"In outward splendour," said he, "I repeat, she has fallen."

"Who, sir?" said lady Ashton, alarmed, and looking about for her daughters.

"Rome's great city, lady."

"Ho!" again repeated her ladyship.

"But she has gained in the pope——"

"Oh, hang the pope!" interrupted she; and laughing, she added, "Now, did you ever kiss his toe?"

"No, lady; it is the cross on his slipper, which we venerate with our lips wherever we find it."

"Pack o' nonsense!" said her elegant ladyship; "it's a great shame to put such

a *sakerd*

a *sakerd* thing as that on a fellow-*creter's* dirty slipper."

"It may seem nonsense," said the friar, gravely, "to a heathen matron."

"Oh! but I'd have you to know," said her ladyship, hastily, "that I'm no heathen. Why, you know, it's all make-believe at these here masquerades—why, I dare say, you're no more a friar than I be."

"Thou hast a fair daughter, lady," said the friar, not noticing the latter part of her ladyship's speech.

"Well, and how *comed* you to know that now?" replied she, laughing; for lady Ashton had been to several private masquerades, and she found there so much pertness, instead of wit, that she thought the first the most requisite qualification.—"And what will you say now," added she, "if I tell you that I have got two, and don't owe the pope of Rome *nothing?*"

"Yes, you are mother to a goddess and a Vestal," said the friar, with a sneer.

"Why,

"Why, la!" exclaimed she, rising from her seat—"who are you, pray, as seems to know all about me and mine?"

"You will soon know," said the friar—"at supper we shall be all *unmasked*."

He laid a particular and meaning kind of stress on the last word, and lady Ashton reseated herself, and said—"Well, sir, and who does not know that?"

"Lady Ashton," said he, in a solemn tone, "hear me—the goddess who seems to draw all worshippers towards her is but a poor frail mortal."

"Well, to be sure, she's nothing else!" said lady Ashton; "besides, sir, though I'm not fond of *papish* priests, like you, I don't believe in all those heathen *ditties*, as my girls call 'em, no more than you does."

"No, madam," said the wily friar; "therefore, though all eyes follow with admiration the real goddess of the evening, your *youngest* daughter——"

"Come, that's a good 'un," again interrupted

terrupted lady Ashton; but thinking herself very wise in not undeceiving him, if he really *was* mistaken, she added—"Well, go on."

"She is," resumed the friar, "the frailest piece of earthly beauty ever formed in heavenly mould, or ever seen in a guilty world of fashionable depravity; she has led captive the lover of her sister, and now, like a true libertine, gives him back to her again—'*O tempora! O mores!*"

"Sir, I must say, I don't think it very decent in you to talk Latin to a lady alone."

"Madam," said the Benedictine, "I have the greatest respect for your virtue; and it is that extreme respect and delicacy that tie my tongue, otherwise I could tell you——"

"Oh, pray go on, and tell me all!" said her ladyship. "I assure you I am vastly diverted, especially at your *solemen* manner."

"A Roman matron!" said the friar, "and

"and find diversion in the discomfiture of her daughter! for the handsome Neapolitan has no love for the bewitching Vestal he is dancing with."

"Mayhap not," said her ladyship, rather mortified; for she had beheld so much animation in the two dancers, that she was in one of the most happy tempers in the world; and she had built edifice upon edifice in the air, till they had attained a height beyond that of Babel. Though all the foundations of lady Ashton's present architecture had their foundation in the clouds, yet they had speedily risen to the eminence already described, till this prating friar knocked them all down, like a mischievous brat throwing a halfpenny against his little brother's castle of cards, which had been raised with even more care and pains than lady Ashton's air-built palaces.

Yet her ladyship consoled herself, that the friar had taken one daughter for another; at least she fancied so; therefore, what

what he said was of no consequence. At the same time she did not feel altogether easy. If she did regard one daughter more than the other, it certainly was the gentle Sophia; and this was not the first time that she had found the purity of her principles, in an indirect way, called in question. She still kept gazing on her with all a mother's fondness, when, suddenly turning her head to address the friar, she found he was gone; and her eye sought in vain for him among the mingling crowds of maskers. She beheld him no more that night.

His place was soon occupied by the fascinating and elegant hostess, the duchess of Arlington, who, alone, unmasked, seemed to be everywhere at once, and with the most winning politeness and attention, to welcome her numerous guests.—"There are some queer characters here to-night, my lady duchess," said lady Ashton.

"Yes, my dear," said the amiable duchess;

duchess, "it is generally so in these chequered scenes. Some play their part well, and some so very ill, that one really feels vexed to see them so mistake their abilities."

"Well," said lady Ashton, "I don't know, to be sure, much about friars, except that I have often heard lord Raspberry, who has been a great deal abroad, where they swarm, as one may say, talk about them; and I wish, with all my heart, that his lordship had seen one as was plaguing me just now, and talking about the pope of Rome, and the ceiling falling, and all *sitch* stuff—I declare he was just what a right *arnest* friar *mought* be."

"I saw that mask you describe, lady Ashton," said the duchess, "seated beside you; that was the first time I saw him this evening, and he has vanished, I know not how: every body saw him for a few minutes only, and then he was gone."

"Why, sure," said lady Ashton, "he

ben't a ghost! I have heard a *papish* lady as I'm acquainted with call her confessor her *ghostly* father. I always thought she made fun of him by calling him so, because the poor man was as thin and as pale as a ghost."

The duchess checked her inclination to laugh, and reduced her risible faculties into a sweet smile, while she kindly explained to her ladyship the meaning of the term; and lady Ashton as kindly thanked her grace, for she was always grateful for information when given with delicacy and good humour.

To record the commonplace insipid chitchat of a London masquerade is a wearisome task, which, should we undertake to perform, would, we are well assured, afford neither interest nor pleasure to our readers; suffice it to say, that after the sprightly dance there passed much conversation between the Vestal virgin and the noble Neapolitan, when the unaffectedly virtuous and artless sentiments of the former

mer had completely re-established her empire over his heart, and he felt that he loved her, not only with ardent tenderness, but with confidence and security. Short is thy reign on earth, oh Happiness! Thy kingdom flourishes there but for an hour, and in one moment it may be overthrown.

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CHAPTER IV.

The Supper.

THE elegant guests of the duchess of Arlington, who chose to unmask and stay supper, had now taken their seats at a table profusely set out with every delicacy, both in and out of season: the Neapolitan placed himself behind his blooming Vestal, who looked, now divested of her mask, the captivating image of youthful purity, innocence, and sprightliness.

The Hindoo priest, his sole homage directed to the beautiful goddess of the eastern clime, saw not the passing scene before him. Ayscough was of that temperament that loved not easily, but when he did love, he loved well: and now his eyes as well as his heart were fixed on the fair divinity

divinity he alone adored among the daughters of the earth.

Habited in a purple domino, richly fringed with silver, and a black hat, fastened with a diamond button and loop, and ornamented by a white waving plume, stood, opposite to Sophia, the earl of Pyrwater: he had been the very first to unmask, and Sophia had just observed to lord Rainsbury—"Your uncle has been a very handsome man," when, if the eye of the basilisk was not a fable, she would have met instant annihilation from the look lord Pyrwater darted at her.

Observation now unmasked, and discovered the sharp and piercing eyes of lady Netterville, which were now checked in their usually-roving career, and seemed only attentively employed in watching the Ashton family, while jolly *Truth* discovered the white teeth and laughing eyes of Mrs. Horton; but her laugh seemed like that of the hyena, as if only determined to destroy, and malice and severe agitation

formed the expression of her countenance. She frequently exchanged glances with lord Pyrwater, who, towards the conclusion of the supper, drew near Sophia, and, with an insidious smile, entered into conversation with her, turning gallantly to his nephew, and saying—"It really is not fair in you to monopolize all the real beauty in this gay assembly." Then pressing the hand of Sophia gently between his own, he whispered her that she appeared the chief of angels amongst a host of angels.

From another kind of person these compliments might have been pleasing in the relation that his lordship stood to the man of her only choice; but lord Pyrwater at that moment had imparted to her not only confusion, but disquietude. His lordship again moved to the opposite side of the table; the daughters of lady Ashton both observed an uncommon restlessness about lady Netterville, while the looks of lord Pyrwater and Mrs. Horton were continu-

ally

ally turned towards the door, as if in anxious expectation of some one entering.

At length a kind of malicious pleasure seemed to light up their countenances, as a clownish-looking countryman entered, masked and carrying a beautiful basket covered over with white satin, which he placed before Sophia Ashton, and then instantly disappeared. The basket was addressed in the following manner:—"A rural offering to the fairest of the fair, the *spotless* Vestal virgin, Miss Sophia Ashton."

"What can this present be?" said all the gay flirts of fashion, crowding round Sophia, who, in all the charming flow of spirits gratified love and conscious innocence could bestow, drew aside the satin envelope, and (oh! what a sight met her eye!) a lovely child, of about ten months old, held between its little fingers, where it had been artfully placed, an unsealed note; and with the natural movement of an infant, it stretched forth its little arms,

and seemed as if imploring her to take the paper. Alas! Sophia knew the child but too well; she gave a piercing shriek as she looked on it, and fainted away.

The mother and sister, anxiously employed in succouring the wretched Sophia, lady Netterville took advantage of the distressing scene to seize the paper; and while a temporary calm was in a manner restored, she requested silence, and frail as she was herself, unpitying to others, she read aloud, for the information of a cruel and curious public, as follows:—

"*To Miss Sophia Ashton.*

"Reject not your offspring: suffer not the wish to obtain an unblemished reputation to render you a cruel mother: your babe, who now lies before you, imploring protection, is an outcast, and must perish without maternal care and assistance. How can a mother, cruel and unfeeling as you have shewn yourself, laugh, dance, and

and sport, amidst the festive scene, and leave the innocent offspring of guilty love to suffering and famine, while its perjured father revels in all the fond indulgence of a sister's affections.

"INCOGNITO."

Consternation sat on every countenance; even the duchess of Arlington, ever ready to judge well of Sophia, knew not what to think: a demoniac satisfaction was painted on the visages of lord Pyrwater and Mrs. Horton, yet there was a degree of vexation mingled with it on that of the latter; she was, it was evident, disappointed, and recrimination of some kind seemed passing in whispers between her and lord Pyrwater.

"Sophy! Sophy!" said the half-distracted mother, "what am I to think of this? —can this child possibly be yours?"

"Oh no, my mother!" said the weeping Sophia; "believe your daughter, who ne-

ver yet disgraced you!—indeed, indeed, it is not."

But no one believed her, and sarcastic looks were exchanged by the ladies, while the rude young men of fashion, unpitying, indulged themselves in witticisms, in loud and audible whispers, which created much laughter, as the circles grouped together in different sets, and left the wretched persons to themselves who were the most interested in this afflicting scene.

Sophia continued to gaze in melancholy sadness over the sweet little innocent, which had got hold of her hand, and smiled in her face, keeping one of Sophia's delicate fingers fast locked in its own. Transfixed almost to a statue, his eyeballs wildly glaring, stood the marquis of Rainsbury, and folding his Neapolitan cloak over his throbbing breast. Miss Ashton, with her arms thrown round her sister, had sunk at her feet.—"Oh, my sweet, injured, spotless sister!" said she, "never, never will your Eliza taste of happiness till

till your fame is as clear before the world as I am assured it is now before Heaven."

Ayscough took her hand.—"My own noble Eliza!" said he.

"Yes, Ayscough," said she, "you have my heart as well as my hand; but never shall it be joined with yours in marriage, till my sister's honourable name shall be as snow-white as ever."

Mrs. Horton laughed aloud.

"Yes, madam," said Miss Ashton, scornfully regarding her, "you may rejoice, but not because the paltry calumny invented against Mr. Ayscough can have any effect on my mind. I know the now-tarnished fame of my sister will soon recover all its former brilliancy, and then it will be seen whether I listen to the forged slanders of envy and malice."

"Ay," said lady Ashton, "it is some cruel *moll-violence* that is now practising against my daughters.—Do you know any thing of this child, Sophia?"

Sophia blushed, wept, and mournfully shook her head."

"Speak, hussy!" said lady Ashton—"do you know any thing about this child?"

"Yes, mamma, I do know—the child ——it is——but indeed I know not whose it is."

Another loud laugh burst from the unfeeling male part of the fashionable world, and the commonplace remark of—"Ay, they say it is a wise child that knows its own father, yet it is curious that so *young* a mother should not know."

"Miss Sophia Ashton," said the duchess of Arlington, after evincing by her looks her marked displeasure at the vulgar remark, "you are wrong not to say all you *do* know concerning this child. Clear your *own* character, my dear young lady, if you can: it behoves you, for the honour of your sex, to do so."

"I cannot, my lady duchess—I know I am much to blame; but it is too late now to repair my fault."

The

The noble-minded interesting sufferer then gazed with tenderness on the infant, and tears fell from her eyes, and dropt on the outstretched hand of the pretty innocent.

"Sophy, speak the truth at once!" said lady Ashton—"you begin, girl, to make me fear you have disgraced your family and *sect* for ever."

"Urge me no more!" said Sophia, with a firmness that cost her gentle nature a most painful effort. "I have said I *cannot* tell all I know, and I *will* not. To you, my dear mother, only am I accountable, and even to you I cannot yet confide this secret."

The duchess looked offended, and politely wished the few remaining guests good night; for this event had dispersed the major part of the select company that had staid supper, who, with affected pity and good-nature, had repaired home to talk over this affair at their leisure, and

mangle

mangle the character of poor Sophia in every society they should hereafter mingle with. The duchess kindly took lady Ashton by the hand, and said—"Good-morning, my poor lady Ashton! I wish we may (but I scarce dare hope it) meet again in happier circumstances. I trust it will not be long before your carriage is ready." But this had been purposely kept back. Her grace then slightly bent to Miss Ashton, and, in a kind of pitying tone, said—"Ayscough, God bless you!" and taking no notice whatever of the weeping Sophia, left the apartment.

Though the presence of the noble hostess had not been able entirely to check the licentious remarks of her guests, yet they had, in respect to her, observed some decorum. On the departure of her grace, however, it seemed entirely banished. Lord Pyrwater, with a demoniac smile, went up to Sophia; and pressing her hand with impudent familiarity, he said—"Chaste Vestal of the sacred fire! though

though you will not tell who it was that personated the god Mars, yet, pray, is this Remus or Romulus?"

"Away, insulter!" said Miss Ashton; "let your guilty conscience conjure up the shade of your noble, injured brother, and ask him which of you disgraced *his* Roman origin?"

Pale and trembling, the earl leaned against a column, while lady Ashton said —"*Lauk*, Betsy! what can you mean by addressing his lordship i' that manner? why, he's quite ill."

"I shall say no more," said Miss Ashton, with a contemptuous smile; "it requires no kind of explanation to him who is alone concerned."

Lord Rainsbury seemed not to attend to any thing that was passing; he still kept his immoveable position, with his eyes wildly glaring. His uncle, recovering himself, said to him—"Come, boy, let us go home."

"Where did you say?" said the marquis,

quis, wildly. "I have no home, but I am going to seek one—I shall set sail for Lisbon to-morrow. Good-night, uncle—perhaps I shall go by the way of America, or the East Indies—ha! ha! Go you home, as fast as you can, for there's fire in the neighbourhood; it began here," added he, wildly clapping his hand to his head—"and now I have no home, except at Lisbon."

The gentleman-usher of the duchess came up to the marquis, and announced his carriage.

"I have no carriage, man," said lord Rainsbury—"no, I must walk home, to Lisbon."

"My lord marquis," said the gentleman-usher, "your servants are in the antiroom; your carriage is drawn up to the very door, and waits for your lordship."

"Tell them," said the marquis, "that I cannot go till the marchioness comes from Lisbon—I expect her every minute."

Lord

Lord Pyrwater regarded his nephew, and appeared seriously alarmed.—"My dear fellow," said he, taking him by the arm, "let me lead you to your carriage—you are not well."

"Do not touch me," said the marquis, wildly shaking him off; "I am dangerous—beware my vengeance—you have insulted beauty under misfortune. Come, my loved Sophia, we will weep over our frailties together; and Diana, you know, will love you and your babe, for she is above the scoffs of a foolish world."

"It is *his* child, I'll bet my best diamonds against your oriental pearls," said a pert female scandal-monger to lady Netterville, who, with demure visage, said—"Ah! what will this world come to! How shocking it is to see such young creatures thus disgracing themselves and their family for ever!" When, lo! it was fated that the earl of Pyrwater was not to be the only one thrown into consternation that memorable morning; for

for a voice seemed to issue from the base of the lofty candelabra, near which lady Netterville had taken her station, and which said—" It well becomes the *ci-devant* butcher's daughter of Whitechapel to rail at female licentiousness—where is the nobleman's child she fathered on poor sir George Netterville?"

This gave the wretched Sophia a momentary relief; for every eye was now turned from her, to gaze on the mortified countenance of lady Netterville. Mrs. Horton only looked at her with complacence, and at length kindly stepped up to her, saying—" My sweet friend, why do you mind such malevolence? or, as lady Ashton would call it, *moll-violence.* Depend upon it, my dear, it is only some trick of her daughter's party—that haughty flame of Ayscough's, Miss Ashton, is capable of any thing."

Mrs. Horton was immensely rich; she gave the most magnificent dinners, routs, and music parties, of any woman in the metropolis;

metropolis; she was beginning to be the fashion, among a certain set especially. Lady Netterville was absolutely requisite to the existence of the coteries of scandal, and she too was rich enough to buy up the favour of them all. They all, therefore, after the example of dear Mrs. Horton, thronged round their charming lady Netterville, to soothe her against the pangs she must feel at such odious *calumny*.

The carriage of lady Ashton was now announced, and the *tender* friends of lady Netterville divided, to contemplate again the scene of the young lady and the child.

Sophia threw the white satin covering over the infant, who had just then, amidst the tumultuous buzz of scandal, fallen asleep.—"What!" said lady Ashton, hastily, "and so, Miss, you are a-going to take home what you *say* doesn't belong to you?"

"Oh,

"Oh, my mother!" said Sophia, "are not you a parent? Could you bear to see your own child bereft of all protection?"

"Oh, Sophy, Sophy!" said lady Ashton, weeping, "you have broken your poor mother's heart! But take your child—it shall not be cast among strangers."

"I am innocent, my dear mamma, of what you suspect me; but I will take charge of that child, in spite of slander, as if it was my own."

The still-beautiful countenance of lady Ashton evinced, by its expression, all that was passing in her agitated mind; but she spoke not, and, with a deep sigh, preceded her daughters.

Miss Ashton, however pride and lofty independence of spirit might have the dominion over her, had yet inherited from her father an excellent heart, which, in her, naturally warm, was imbued with the most fervent sisterly affection. She hung

hung on the arm of her sister, while Mr. Ayscough was about to take her disengaged hand; but she waved it towards her mother, and Ayscough respectfully handed the good lady to her carriage; but all his entreaties to see the ladies safe home were of no avail.

During the exit of lady Ashton and her daughters, the marquis of Rainsbury had thrown himself on a sofa, and his wild eyes seemed fixed on vacancy, when, on a sudden, he caught the sight of Sophia, with the basket containing the infant under her arm; then a loud maniac laugh escaped him, and rising from his seat, he made considerable confusion amongst the few remaining guests, and sad havoc and destruction amongst the brittle ornaments of the duchess of Arlington's elegant supper-room. Lord Pyrwater however dispatched, as soon as possible, some athletic men, accustomed to frenzied patients, to the duke's mansion; and the unhappy marquis, having *terrassé*

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one or two of them, was carried home, bound hand and foot; and before the next day, was in a dangerous and confirmed brain-fever.

CHAP.

CHAPTER V.

A Child of Mystery.

THE afflicted family of the Ashtons rode home from the scene they had participated in, in so conspicuous a manner, to their splendid town residence, at about four in the morning, in melancholy silence—a silence interrupted only by the watchman's additional information concerning the hour, that it was a cloudy morning, which drew from lady Ashton the remark of—"Ah! cloudy enough for me, I think!"

This caused a deep sigh, or rather a sob, to burst from the gentle bosom of the wretched Sophia; and silence being now broken, Miss Ashton energetically said—"Do not sigh in that heart-rending way,

way, my beloved sister; I am well convinced that truth will at length prevail, and your now-injured fame be as white as ever."

"No, never," said lady Ashton; "and, Sophia, let me tell you, you are a very obstinate, wicked girl, to keep all to yourself about that nasty little brat."

"Oh, my dear mother!" said Sophia, "why insult such harmless, unoffending innocence? Think only what the mother of this child suffers at this moment—and shall helpless innocence suffer also?"

"You are an obstinate hussy," said lady Ashton, "and I shall begin to think that you are really the mother of it in right *arnest* yourself."

"My dear mother," said Sophia, "I have never deceived you, or disgraced you. I have assured you that the child is none of mine; nevertheless, if you will persist in thinking it is, I shall make no more asseverations: and another thing—lest I should unwarily be drawn into making

making any confession of what I know concerning it, I am resolved, from this moment, not to utter another word to any question that may be asked me about it; nor will I heed the opinion of the world. Allow me only, my dear mother, a sufficient yearly income to live on moderately, and to support me and this child. Let us go into some distant country, where the name of Sophia Ashton may never more be heard; and trust me, in the world of fashion, ever in search of something new, it will soon be forgotten."

"And do you think, Sophia," said Miss Ashton, "that though you close your heart against your sister, and refuse her your confidence, that she will ever suffer you to dwell in seclusion without her? No, I will share your solitude, I am determined; therefore, if my mother will not afford us sufficient to exist on, we will endeavour to obtain it by the exercise of those accomplishments we both possess."

"Oh dear!" said lady Ashton, "here's a pretty *kittle* of fish; and all along with that *preverse* young puss, and be hanged to her, God forgive me! But, however, I'm your mother still—so don't go for to make yourselves uneasy. Though I once worked for my bread myself, don't think that the daughters of sir Edward Ashton, to whom I owe all my riches, shall ever do the like of that! No, no, your poor mother, as prided herself so in her *vartuous* girls, and who never thought to see this day in her *inclining* years, she'll go with you, and share your *solintary* lot. Ah, lack-a-daisy me! no husbands now for my daughters—all's over; nothing but scandal talked everywhere about them, and their characters blasted by envy and *moll-violence*."

Just as her ladyship finished this soliloquy, the coach stopped at her door. A saucy grin was discoverable on the countenance of the new town-footman they had hired but a few days before, while on that

that of the other faithful servant sat an appearance of deep concern, as he took the basket from the hands of his young mistress before she descended from her carriage, and which, according to orders, he carried up into the drawing-room, as he followed lady Ashton and her daughters. The waiting-maid of Sophia came down, rubbing her eyes, and exclaimed—"Dear Miss, I little thought of seeing you home so soon!"

Sophia, without attending to her remark, said—"You have been accustomed, Allanson, to children; take care of this little creature till to-morrow, when we will provide a nurse for it."

The waiting-maid gave an involuntary start at seeing the lovely infant, and then regarded the red and tearful eyes of the ladies. Lady Ashton, drawing up her head with an air of consequence, which she, poor lady! knew was all assumed, said—"There is a little *fondling*, Allanson, which must be *purvided* for."

Allanson curtseyed, took the child, as she was ordered, and the ladies all retired, with their respective *soubrettes*, to their different apartments.

The agitation of Sophia, and the severe distress which she seemed to labour under, did not escape the searching eye of Miss Allanson; but there was a dignity about both of the daughters of lady Ashton, that precluded all familiarity from a servant, unless Miss Ashton sometimes descended: an impertinent or misplaced question was sometimes reproved, but never answered, by either of the sisters, when put by their *soubrettes*. Allanson, therefore, was at a loss how to play her cards. She had strong suspicions concerning her young mistress; she felt certain that the child was not unknown to her, for she had a faint recollection of it, when a *very* little babe, when in Devonshire; and that Miss Sophia used to go out at the back-gate of the park there that led into a lane, caress the infant with much

much caution, and after looking round before she shut the gate, walk back to the house alone: and often, in her walks to the village that was near the seat belonging to lady Ashton, she has observed Miss Sophia use much mystery and circumspection. Yet all this had never before struck her as any thing extraordinary, because the young ladies need not have used any precaution, for they always did just what they pleased, particularly in the country; and her young mistress was very fond of children, and played with and caressed all those that belonged to the cottagers in and near the neighbourhood.

The now-thoughtful waiting-maid had taken a good nap on the sofa in Sophia's dressing-room, from whence the unexpected earliness of the ladies' return had roused her. Her little bedfellow slept beside her, with all the calm tranquillity of innocence; but Miss Allanson had taken a good nap before, and she now lay, with wakeful eyes and busy thoughts,

pondering in her mind on this unlooked-for event.

Michael, the new footman, had felt his heart ensnared by the black eyes and ruddy cheeks of Miss Allanson; and his assiduities about her, as he was a handsome-looking fellow, were received as well as he could wish. He longed to impart to her the tale of scandal he had heard the night before, as he had it from the earl of Pyrwater's servants; and from which noble earl, we are ashamed to record, they had their instructions: but the three waiting-women to the Ashton family always breakfasted with the housekeeper in her apartment; therefore Michael could get no opportunity of paying his devoirs to Miss Allanson, till just before her lady's bell rang for her assistance, which, notwithstanding the fatigue and agitation of the late evening, sounded its unwelcome peal at an earlier hour than usual in town after a late party: and while Michael was in the midst of a very interesting and scandalous

scandalous detail of the whole affair, that had caused so much bustle at the duke of Arlington's, a second peal, longer than the former one, obliged the lovers to separate; but not before Miss Allanson had heard that the child was certainly Miss Sophia's, and that the marquis of Rainsbury had gone stark staring mad, to find it had for its father Mr. Ayscough!

Miss Allanson, therefore, went up with all the sauciness her ignorant mind prompted her to assume, triumphing over the fallen virtue of her who, forsooth, she thought to herself, imagined she was her superior; but she felt rather dismayed at seeing the two sisters, already dressed, seated together in serious conversation; their heavy eyes plainly evincing that neither of them had tasted, that morning, the blessing of sleep. Miss Ashton, on the entrance of the *soubrette*, immediately retired.—" La, Miss!" said Miss Allanson, pertly, " don't take on so; I'm sure, Miss Sophy, as my lady calls you, had

you thought proper to have trusted me, this had never happened."

"I do not understand you," said Sophia, looking at her with a dignity that, for a moment, awed the waiting-maid yet whose ignorance caused the first thought of her little mind to utter to itself—"Well, how these ladies of fashion can carry such things off!" and soon recovering her tongue, she said—"Why this public exposure, Miss, of your misfortune about your dear little babe."

"Yes, Miss Allanson, the babe will be always dear to me; and though I do not desire to justify my conduct to you, only so far as it behoves me to set a good example, I assure you the child is none of mine."

"Report, however, Miss," said Miss Allanson, pertly, "(and I am sure, I do not know why there should be so much harm), gives it to you; and, as I said before, Miss, had you but thought proper to have confided in me——"

"I do

"I do not wish to hear either your principles or your promises," interrupted Sophia, indignantly. "However, it is well that you have shewn yourself in your true colours. I never before found you guilty even of pertness, or the least undue familiarity towards me. I have, therefore, the less regret in informing you why I rang for you, which was to tell you I had no further occasion for your services; and as I certainly should have felt some reluctance at parting with you, be assured I do not now feel any. Mr. White, my mother's steward, has orders to pay you whatever is customary, in addition to what is due to you, to compensate for my sudden dismissal of you. I would have still further rewarded you, had you proved yourself the same kind and well-behaved girl I once knew you, and ever thought you till now—I am sorry you do not merit the good opinion I had formed of you."

"Oh, Miss!" said the now-humbled

and weeping Miss Allanson, "what had I done then before, that made you resolve to part with me?"

"Nothing," said Sophia, kindly, "but what was faithful, attentive, and obliging; but when a poor, innocent, helpless little being is cast on my protection, you dare to insinuate that I have so degraded the name of Ashton, and disgraced myself, by being the mother of that child, my good opinion of you is no more; and I repeat that I feel no regret in parting with you. We are going, for a short time, to reside abroad, and we shall be attended chiefly by foreign servants—when I want your assistance to arrange my clothes for our voyage, which will soon take place, I will ring for you."

So saying, Sophia turned from the deeply-afflicted waiting-maid, and applied herself to writing. All the golden dreams of poor Miss Allanson were now at an end; she had ever been accustomed to the most winning smiles and sweetness of

manners

manners from her young mistress; and now that demeanour was changed for a silent seriousness, which evinced real displeasure at the pertness and folly of her conduct; while, worse than all that, Michael, with whom she had built many an air-built edifice, now blamed her very severely for her haste; and beginning to display his bad French and pretended learning, with which he had so often astonished her, he exclaimed—" Oh! I was quite mistaken in you—I had no *idear* you was such a silly girl. A waiting-maid, and not know how to dissemble! *Ah, miserable, vraiment!* Why, what business had you to say a word about your young lady's *bâtarde;* suppose she'd twenty of 'em, are you to tell her of it? Why, even if you'd caught her *en fragrant délit,* as a French fellow once said to me, when I happened to put a silver *forchet* into my pocket by mistake, what was that to you? Why you should hear and see all, girl, and say nothing,

and pretend you don't see nothing. Ten to one now (but it's your own fault), if the whole *kit* of us are not sent about our business. As for me, I've already served a good long apprenticeship in London, and I never fear getting a place; but if you go on speaking point blank, so as you tell me you have been fool enough to do, why you'll never keep a place long enough to wind your mistress round your finger while you live, and *consequentially* you'll never be able to make a penny. Fie, fie! you've not acted at all *politicially*—not that it is any thing to me, for most *proverbly* we shall never see one another no more, after we quit this here house."

So saying, Michael quitted the miserable waiting-maid, without even a sigh, and without scarce honouring her with one look; and regretting much more the probability of losing a very excellent place than the loss of her society.

Miss Ashton had, however, a more arduous

duous task than her sister to perform, in parting with *her* maid: she had, as we have before hinted, sometimes, as many ladies naturally haughty will do, when devoured by *ennui*, and for want of better employment, a want such an accomplished young lady never ought to have experienced, condescended to listen with seeming satisfaction to the tales of scandal with which Mrs. Blisset's budget of intelligence abounded. However, she took care never to introduce a topic till Miss Ashton herself first started it; and when that lady was weary of her prattle, she could always silence this most submissive of all *soubrettes* with—"Well, have done; I don't want any more of your conversation."

Mrs. Blisset was an useful, clever, and obedient servant; consequently Miss Ashton was very loth indeed to part with her. But this was not all; perhaps at this time Miss Ashton would rather have had any *other* clever female to attend about her person; but unfortunately Mrs. Blisset had

had lived with lady Netterville, and her ladyship had told Miss Ashton, that if ever she felt inclined to part with Blisset, who certainly was the cleverest creature in the world, she really believed she should be tempted to take her again. This Miss Ashton knew would open a fresh door to scandal, and the fatal business of the masquerade, which might die away on the succession of some new adventure, would for ever be refreshed by the indefatigable slander of lady Netterville, continually assisted by such a coadjutor. The sisters therefore agreed that it would be better, if Blisset was willing to accompany them in their retreat, to retain her.

Not any of the three members of the afflicted family had pressed their pillows; they had merely changed their dresses, and sat the remainder of the hours, till their faithful old servant, Edward, had brought up their coffee, at ten o'clock, into lady Ashton's dressing-room; they had sat, the preceding sad hours, in deep consultation

as

as to the future place of their retirement, which, though it might be long, yet they hoped it would be but temporary, because they well knew that Mr. Ayscough would lay every possible plan, and exert the most indefatigable diligence, to find out the authors and actors of this nefarious attack on the character of a virtuous young lady and his own happiness.

Wales was thought on as the most desirable place of sojournment by lady Ashton; but on this Miss Ashton put a positive negative, as they were so well known there, almost through the whole of the twelve counties. Lady Ashton remarked, that as she had now become the slave of her daughters, she should propose nothing more, adding only—"And pray, Miss Wiseacre, where is it as you does choose to go with your sister and her misbegotten bantling?"

Sophia, without seeming to notice her mother's speech, asked Eliza what she thought of Switzerland?

"Too

"Too much, my love," said Miss Ashton, "the resort of every English person of fashion and affected learning, who fancy they have seen every thing, if they have been freezing among the Glaciers; and if a little snow has fallen upon them, declare they were very near being buried under an avalanche, which was just bursting over them. But we have no time for satire. I decide for France, as a place of both pleasant and secure retreat."

"My dear Eliza," said Sophia, with a forced smile, "you seem however to think it a time for *badinage;* or are you only laughing at me for proposing Switzerland?"

"No, no, Sophia," said Miss Ashton, seriously.

"Why, I am sure," interrupted lady Ashton, "France, as well as Paris, swarms, as a body may say, with English; and how can we get to France without going there, when I'm sure I know enough to know that France is in Paris."

"My

"My dear mother," said Miss Ashton, "you might as well say that Yorkshire and Devonshire are in London. I should decidedly speak in favour of Yorkshire, did not that scandal-monger lady Netterville's country-house happen to be in a very centrical part of that county; and Mrs. Horton, who often laments to her dear friend how far apart they are, though in the same county, always passes her summer at her rich uncle's seat. I had forgot also Colebrook Priory, in quite another quarter of this spacious county, the romantic seat belonging to the marquis of Rainsbury, and an old stately mansion belonging to that *worthy* descendant of the ancient Romans, the earl of Pyrwater. And now hear me, dear mamma: I do not mean that we should go *near* Paris, but that we should retire to one of those delightful situations in Normandy, within a ride of a good town, and many of those picturesque and charming retreats are scattered about in the vicinity of Caen and Bayeux. That part

part of France is healthy; it is a climate, the temperature of which is the same as our own, but it is not charged with fogs and damp, neither is it inconstant like ours. I know it is—at least the city of Caen itself, much frequented by the English; but they are those who, though truly respectable, yet they do not belong exactly to the circles in which we move. Now all this that I have stated, I know to be so, not only from the intelligence I have received from Mr. Ayscough, but also from the duke of Arlington and from Sir Lucius Torrington, who very lately made the tour of Normandy; and they laugh at the English for thronging round fine and dirty Paris, while they leave the ancient monuments of architecture, the healthful air and clean inhabitants, and their many English customs, of Normandy."

After some more conversation on the subject, it was agreed that they should embark at Southampton for Havre-de-Grace,

Grace, and proceed to Caen, where they would have time, through the assistance of Mr. Ayscough, who was to accompany them till he saw them settled, to look out for a handsome and rural retirement in that vicinity. He was overjoyed to find the ladies so disposed to confide in his friendship, as, after his calling, the next day, on his own offers to travel with them, he found it was what they had themselves agreed on.—"And," said lady Ashton, "I sha'n't call on one of them; for, mayhap, I should only get insulted. If you see any one afore you go, you will see how they are; and if they says any thing, tell them you are going with us to make a *tower* in Normandy."

"And," added Eliza, "tell them that my mother, having the highest opinion of your architectural abilities, cannot finish the building without your assistance."

The lady was, however, rather mortified to find her wit so thrown away, or rather so misplaced, that it did not meet with

one

one approving smile. She therefore changed the subject, and said, in rather an humbled kind of manner—" I think it best (do not you, mamma, and do not you, sir?) that there should be no kind of disguise or concealment in regard to who we really are; and let the infant pass for that of a particular friend gone abroad, who has entrusted it to our care."

The late freezing look of Ayscough was now changed to a smile of approbation, as he pressed the hand of Eliza, and said—" Miss Ashton has judged well (as she seldom fails of doing) in the present instance."

The coachman, who had long lived in the family, and who was an excellent servant, was retained, as was the faithful Edward and Mrs. Blisset, who was proud and delighted to be so distinguished, and a good nurse for the child. These were all the English servants who were to attend them while in France; and lady Ashton, leaving all her estates, and the management

management of them, safe in the hands of the trustworthy Mr. White, furnished herself with letters of credit on an eminent banker in Caen; and the family of the Ashtons, accompanied by Mr. Ayscough, and the little *protégé* of Sophia, proceeded on their journey with all possible speed.

We shall now leave them for a while, and hasten to inform our readers with all that we can at present acquaint them concerning this mysterious little personage, who made so conspicuous a figure in its basket amongst the characters at the duchess of Arlington's masquerade.

About eight months before that eventful period, a lady in the bloom of youth arrived, in a postchaise-and-four, at the humble cottage of an industrious and honest pair of the name of Clarkson. The cottage was situated at the end of a green lane, in a romantic part of Devonshire, and near to Ashton Park; it was also not far from the pleasant seat of Mr. Hawthorn.

Hawthorn. The lady, whose carriage, beauty, and fine Roman features, spoke her above the common order, evinced a dignity in every movement, that proclaimed her noble. She was however unattended, and bore herself an infant, of about six weeks old, in her arms. She desired to speak to Mrs. Clarkson, whom, after she had entered the cottage, she thus addressed — "I am told, Mrs. Clarkson, that you have lately lost an infant son; oh! be a mother to mine, and I will amply reward you! I have a son who lives, and I am obliged for a while to desert him, and he is as if dead to me." Mrs. Clarkson burst into a flood of tears. —"Do not weep, my good woman," said the lady; "I was very wrong, and I am very sorry that I spoke on a subject which must have awakened all your former afflictions. At the same time, be assured, if the kindest friendship, and the most unremitting bounty, can help to assuage the sorrow you feel at a loss that not all

your

your tears can ever repair, depend on me for it; only take care of my boy, and when I come for him, let me find him in all the charming health I now give him into your hands. Your child was but a fortnight older; you have therefore yet a mother's aliment in store; wean him at a proper time, and bring him up as hardy as may be consistent with his health. I am told how dearly you love these little innocents, and to a woman of such tenderness I feel happy to confide my first, my only child; but do not ask me who he is—that is a secret that cannot yet be revealed. Ask me not a single question concerning it; his name you will find, at least his baptismal names, when you undress him. I must quit you, my boy," added she, bursting into tears, "till the day arrives when I may claim you before all the world. You are," said she, in a dignified manner, turning to Mrs. Clarkson, "an honest and chaste wife, and do not suffer yourself to think, for one moment,

ment, that I have disgraced my name or my sex, by giving into your care an illegitimate child. No, this dear babe is born to dignity of station and to fortune, and to which he bears the right of inheritance. Here, good Mrs. Clarkson," added she, again bursting into tears, and putting into her hands the sum of fifty pounds, "here is something for the present; and every quarter, in addition to that little entrance-money, the sum of thirty pounds will be regularly sent you, under the signature of ANNA, for EDGAR."

She then, in an agony of grief and agitation, caught her babe to her breast, and wept for some time over him, when, with a sudden effort, which seemed to cost her much, she placed it in the arms of the kind Mrs. Clarkson, and hastily stepped into her carriage; but as she leaned forward to kiss her hand to the worthy woman, she perceived a genteel-looking young female, of rather an interesting appearance,

pearance, standing within the threshold of the cottage-door, and who must, she doubted not, have heard all the latter part of her mysterious speech. This made her, as well as Mrs. Clarkson, who knew she must have heard a great deal, from the time the young girl said she had been there, very uneasy at first; but as nothing was known to transpire, it soon was banished from their bosoms.

Months wore away; the first quarter came regularly paid to the time, and soon after another fifty pounds were sent; but the mother had never called to see her child. About a fortnight before the masquerade, poor Mrs. Clarkson's feelings may be better imagined than described, when the child, one evening, was stolen from its cradle, while she left it sleeping, only to go up stairs to her chamber to fetch some needlework.

It will easily occur to the reader, that this must be the child brought in the basket to the masquerade; and the ladies

 had

had all malevolently remarked, particularly Mrs. Horton, the better to give the infant to Ayscough, that the quilt and its linen were marked with the initials E. A.

As it lay on the lap of Sophia, one day of their journey, she whispered her sister —"How thoughtless we have been, never to give this child a name!" when, taking hold of its arm as it cried, she added—"I am sure something hurts its arm—there is some substance, that feels hard, bound tight round it."

When stripping off the sleeve, she beheld, round its arm, a thin piece of gold, with a soft elastic clasp; and on the gold was engraven, in small letters, "EDGAR ATHELING."

"Oh, well," said Miss Ashton, "this is lucky! we must call him Edgar, of course."

"Ay, ay," said lady Ashton; "but the best luck, in my opinion, is the having found out the sirname: now, Mr. Ayscough, you can, I am sure, by an ADVERTISEMENT,

VERTISEMENT, easily find out Mr. Atheling."

It was almost in vain that Mr. Ayscough and Miss Ashton took every kind of pains to explain to her ladyship, that Edgar Atheling were only two Christian names—no, she was like the "man convinced against his will;" and after long persisting in being of "the same opinion still," with a number of "Don't tell me's," she at length seemed to understand, saying—"You may call 'em *Christian* names, if you please, but to me they sound so heathenish, that I would not give *sitch* to my *angular* cat."

But we must again bid the travellers adieu, and see what the rest of our *dramatis personæ* are doing in London.

CHAPTER VI.

Morning Visiting.

After the ladies, who had staid to partake of the elegant supper given by the duchess of Arlington at her masquerade, had recovered their fatigue, they sallied forth to pay their morning visits to those houses where they were generally received in person—at others they were obliged frequently only to leave their cards.

Amongst those who continued to sow plentifully the seeds of slander, and to propagate the growth of that scandal, which had now so cruelly sprung up to ruin the fair fame of the Ashton family, were lady Netterville and Mrs. Horton; by which two *worthy* characters, the certainty of Ayscough being the father of

Sophia

Sophia Ashton's child was roundly asserted, and industriously disseminated. The initials on the linen were called in to support the truth of their bold asseverations, and, by the indefatigable manœuvres of lady Netterville, circulated through the metropolis.

Skilled in these artful manœuvres, she had obtained a ticket for the eventful masquerade for her dear friend Mrs. Horton, of whom the duchess of Arlington had heard much, and had seen her at one or two crowded parties; but her grace was by no means desirous of cultivating her acquaintance.

Mrs. Horton, after the masquerade, called with lady Netterville twice at the duke of Arlington's town residence, to pay the duchess a morning visit; but the two ladies were obliged to be content with the honour of leaving their cards: and to the great mortification of Mrs. Horton, the duchess of Arlington, though a female of exemplary good breeding,

nevertheless thought such breeding not indispensably due to a woman like Mrs. Horton; and therefore, desirous of getting rid of her acquaintance, she never left her card in return. As to lady Netterville, for reasons above stated, though she earnestly wished to drop all connexion with her, yet regard to the memory of the duke's only relative had rendered that a more difficult task.

Of a delicate and refined mind, the duchess of Arlington had a soul particularly warm in the cause of friendship; she had imbibed a strong affection for Sophia Ashton, and she found, as she reflected on the scandalous scene that had taken place under her roof, and before her eyes, that it gave her more mental suffering than she was aware of, and which was far more severe than the slight bodily malady occasioned by a severe cold, and which had barred, for more than a week, her door against all visitants. Innocent as Sophia had declared herself, and as she

really

really might be, yet her character was for ever tarnished in the world of fashion, and nothing but a public proof of her rectitude of conduct could re-establish her in the good opinion of society; for

"No penance can absolve our guilty fame,
Nor tears, that wash out sin, can wash out shame."

There is an inconsistency sometimes in great minds, when curiosity will get the better of every other feeling; yet let us not be too prompt to call the duchess of Arlington inconsistent: she was actuated by the interests attached to friendship, in wishing to learn how the tide went in favour of poor Sophia; and she gave orders, that the next time lady Netterville came *alone*, on a morning visit, that *she* might be admitted, and after her no one else.—"She is," thought her grace, "a fashionable gossip; she finds her way into every circle, and she will tell me all I wish to know of general opinion—alas! how often false!"

The duchess would have called herself on lady Netterville, after her grace's first quitting home, but she was fearful of finding with her her inseparable friend, Mrs. Horton. It was not long however before lady Netterville gave a third call, for *her* card had been exchanged, and she was admitted, because she was alone.

After some desultory conversation, each lady hemmed several times; each lady was anxious to broach a subject which neither of them wished to be the first to begin. Her ladyship waited, and hoped the duchess would first ask some question relative to the late affair, and her grace anxiously waited for the *ci-devant* beauty of Mile-End to start it. At length the afflicting illness of the marquis of Rainsbury became the topic, and this led lady Netterville to observe to her dear amiable duchess, how much she must have been distressed by the cruel and scandalous scene which took place during the festive,

festive, elegant, and hospitable entertainment given by her valued friend.

The duchess blushed at receiving this praise from a woman she inwardly despised, and a consciousness of her having admitted her to gratify curiosity rendered the blush on her cheek yet deeper.

"Ah, my lady duchess!" said Netterville, "the depravity of some young girls makes *me* sometimes blush for my own sex; no wonder your delicate mind causes your cheeks to glow at such artifice as that we were now speaking of."

Though the duchess of Arlington had that share of vanity which every fine woman of exalted rank may be supposed to possess, which might make her pleased with a well-turned compliment, dictated by good breeding from the lips of a worthy character, yet at fulsome flattery, from such an one as lady Netterville, she felt disgusted, and she said—"You heard Miss Sophia Ashton solemnly assert her

innocence, and something seems to persuade me she *is* innocent."

"My dear lady duchess," said lady Netterville, "why, Ayscough has owned the child, and has accompanied the whole family of the Ashtons to France, where, I believe, if he marries either of the sisters, it will, of course, be Miss Sophia."

"If," said the duchess, "the child is really his, I hope he will. But how do you know, lady Netterville, that Mr. Ayscough has really owned the child? Surely you are misinformed; is it likely that Miss Ashton would accompany her sister with her own former suitor? I am sure Miss Ashton has too much real dignity of mind."

"My dear duchess," said lady Netterville, "I am sure I need not tell you that Miss Ashton never loved Ayscough; she was only proud of having him in her train, because it was the ardent wish of almost every English young lady to make a con-

a conquest of him. No, no; I know very well where her heart is really given, and she hopes to find him in France who was its first choice, and who is gone there to escape his numerous creditors."

"Ah!" said the duchess, "I once thought she was partial to the gentleman you allude to; but I believe now it was only the foolish, fancied love of a young girl. The good sense of Miss Ashton, I should imagine, has now taught her better; and I think she really preferred a man so highly gifted, both with mental and personal endowments, as Ayscough, to any other in the world. They are formed for each other; both fond of literature, both magnificent in their propensities; she delights in splendour, and Ayscough in all the pomp and luxuries of the East, when well tempered by taste, and never acting as a bar to deeds of benevolence."

"Think then, my dear lady duchess," said lady Netterville, "what must be her

mortification at finding out the intrigue carried on by her sly sister and her dear Ayscough!"

"My good lady," said the duchess, after having pondered some time, "a thought has just struck me: Mr. Ayscough has not been above eleven months in England; that child is at least ten months old. Unhappily we have all our weak sides; I have been told that the otherwise-faultless Sophia Ashton, led away by some romantic nonsense of school friendships, imbibed an affection for a very unworthy object, who left her father's house, to run off with an adventurer, who afterwards deserted her. May not this child belong to that girl? and Miss Sophia's mistaken principles of honour may determine her not to say all she knows about it."

"Oh, duchess!" said lady Netterville, half-laughing, "it is impossible to tell the precise age of a child by its size! My sweet babe, though still-born, to the last-

ing

ing disappointment of my beloved sir George and myself, was produced within the seven months, yet was as fine an infant as was ever beheld. Besides, Mr. Ayscough, begging your grace's pardon, was a twelvemonth in England the latter end of last autumn — that is the real truth."

"But then," said the duchess, "your ladyship must allow that it is but a very few months since he has been admitted to any very particular intimacy in the Ashton family, or been received and acknowledged as the accepted lover of Miss Ashton."

"But admitting all this, duchess," said lady Netterville, "you may rest assured that there is not a shadow of a doubt but what the child is Ayscough's, and the mother is Sophia Ashton. As to that silly, unfortunate creature, that was her friend, I know something of her unlucky *faux-pas*, and can speak with the utmost confidence, when I assert, that she never had

had a child by her seducer. I would not be guilty of a falsehood, especially against the honour of my own sex, but I can positively assure your grace, that I have it from the most authentic source—from one who was actually present when the arrangement was made for the journey of the Ashtons into France, that Ayscough confessed the relationship in which the child stood to him and Miss Sophia Ashton. But after they are married, they may come back, and the reputation of the wealthy Mrs. Ayscough, though the child is unfortunately born out of wedlock, will be as white as ever."

"Among a certain set, I grant you," said the duchess, "but never will it recover its brightness with the truly correct. The publicity with which the little innocent, the only guiltless personage among the whole, but who will be the only outcast—that publicity, as I said, with which it was given into the care of its mother, and that mother but yet a child herself,

strictly

strictly speaking, will be very long before it is forgotten."

"Oh, certainly," said lady Netterville, "among such as *us*, who cannot possibly countenance any thing of that kind, she never can expect to be cherished as before, however we may sometimes be obliged to meet her at the parties of those who are not so select as our own."

This speech the once-meretricious lady Netterville uttered with brazen front, and with an unblushing cheek. Had the duchess of Arlington known what her husband's honourable kinsman had never divulged nor boasted of, or indeed had never mentioned to any one, except to the indigent baronet himself, to whom lady Netterville made so faithless a wife —had the duchess known this, how virtuously, and how nobly severe, would have been the reproof she would have given to this retailer of scandal! As it was, she let fall an eyebeam on her countenance, which rather disconcerted her lady-

ship,

ship, for the duchess never had a very good opinion of her; and lady Netterville having now vented her spleen and malice, and, she hoped, fully convinced her grace of the worthlessness of Ayscough and Sophia, she hurried to Berkeley-square, to take a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her beloved Mrs. Horton.

"My dear Horton," said she, "every thing now goes on as we could wish; I have been sitting these last three hours with my friend, the duchess of Arlington, and she has swallowed down the tale of Ayscough and Sophia Ashton as glibly as we could wish."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Horton, sullenly, "it has been a foolish, blundering, patchwork business all together—thanks to that old gouty fool, Pyrwater!"

"I grant it, in some respects, my love," said lady Netterville; "but nothing could have succeeded better in rendering Ayscough odious in the eyes of his adored Miss Ashton—totally preventing his mar-

riage

riage with her; and was not that what you wished, darling? Besides, we have rendered the whole Ashton family odious in the eyes of the fashionable world."

"Hang such a world!" said Mrs. Horton; "give me only Ayscough and love, and a fig for every member of the fashionable world!—of what service is one of them to me? They will all partake of my entertainments, and the greater part of them, when I go out to pay them morning visits, suffer their footmen to take my cards at their doors. How condescending! and even such upstarts as my lady Slipslop Ashton are denied to me! As to your friend, as you call her, the duchess of Arlington, with all her pretended elegance, has no more real politeness than a washerwoman—never once to leave a card even at my house, after all my *paper* visits! I wish I had not gone to her masquerade, such a bungling business as was made of it! Had the brat been given, as I intended, to that proud hussy,

hussy, Miss Ashton, instead of that milk-and-water bit of goods, her pretty-faced sister, it would have effectually prevented Ayscough from marrying his goddess. Absurd fellow! to make her and himself so ridiculously conspicuous, by the choice of their masquerade characters!"

"My sweet friend," said lady Netterville, "how can you be so vexed at what, I cannot but say, has been most admirably well conducted? never was a plan so well laid, or so cleverly carried through. We knew the child—Sophia Ashton too knew it well; and her foolish romantic ideas were sure to make her act in the way we could wish, and which she exactly has done. Think only, as I said before, what a stigma is thrown on all the Ashton family! so that Mr. Ayscough, who is extremely nice on the score of reputation, will never marry either of the girls, depend upon it."

"Either!" screamed out Mrs. Horton; "why you utter falsehoods, lady Netterville,

ville, till you fancy they are truths; and so, because you have been regaling the ears of the duchess of Arlington with a tale, as you told me you intended, of Ayscough marrying Sophia Ashton, you are talking to *me* about his marrying *either*, as if he ever thought of the pretty, little, regular-featured young doll!—no; she is not the kind of beauty after his taste."

The ladies soon after sat down to a sumptuous dinner, and in indulging her sensuality in the dainties of the table, Mrs. Horton forgot for a while the mortified feelings of disappointed love, and the neglect of that man whom alone she might be said really to love, if that pure passion could find any place in such a mind as hers. The rich wines that accompanied the dessert, as she never *drank* to *excess*, caused, by their moderate potion, a return of that irascibility she was giving way to, when her dear friend and coadjutor first entered. Lady Netterville had been used to storms of temper and recrimination

recrimination among the members of the scandalous school, and she wisely pretended a prior evening engagement, and took her leave at an early hour, when the misnamed *good-natured* Mrs. Horton kindly embraced her, begged she would take nothing amiss she had uttered in the bitterness of her vexation, and immediately ordered her carriage for the Opera.

Here we shall leave this Eastern dame, in the vain endeavour of harmonizing her mind, and proceed, in the next chapter, to speak of those other characters who are important personages in this history.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VII.

Resolution and Disappointment.

After combating with the most severe frenzy and raging fever, for the space of three weeks, the marquis of Rainsbury at length sunk into a profound sleep, for almost the whole of two nights and days. His uncle, who was not without fondness for him, was inconsolable; he feared that lethargy had succeeded to madness, and he expected every minute that his nephew would sink into the sleep of death. The physicians themselves pronounced his case hopeless, except this crisis should take a favourable turn; and even then his life would hang but by a feeble thread, and every indulgence and compliance must be granted with his future wishes, if reason should

should return, or the weakness of the body must sink under any violent conflicts or agitation of the mind.

This the earl readily complied with, as he well knew that if sense did return, his nephew would never think of wedding a female whose character was so stained as that of the calumniated Sophia.

At length the marquis awaked, and seemed like one aroused to some painful and deeply-afflicting recollection, which, as reason returns when we are thoroughly awake, is found to be no vision of the night, but a keen and agonizing reality. He wondered where he had been for a length of time; but the horrid remembrance of what he had witnessed at the masquerade rushed on his tortured mind, and his nerves fearfully shaken, he burst into a violent flood of tears.

They were however salutary, and afforded much relief to his oppressed bosom. A fixed determination of mind seemed to follow, and its expression diffused itself

over

over his yet beautiful, though pallid, countenance.

The earl of Pyrwater himself presented to him a cordial restorative, entreating him to take it. The marquis feebly, but gratefully, thanked him, and weakly pressed the hand that offered it. Oh, it was thou, iron-hearted man! that had reduced thy nephew to the state in which thou then beheldest him, struggling between life and death, on the brink of eternity! But thy depraved mind would not, even then, prompt thee to make atonement by a full confession of thy guilt.

When the marquis of Rainsbury was pronounced out of immediate danger, on account of his youth, and on the departure of the fever on the brain, yet he was reduced to a state of extreme debility, and almost to a skeleton. He appeared to be particularly emulous of gaining strength, took every possible method to hasten his recovery; and when he was able to sit up each day for a few hours, he addressed his uncle,

uncle, in the presence of his physician, in the following manner—" You know, my lord, that the time is now very near, that I shall be at liberty to act entirely as I please; till then, if such is your wish, I will remain, but my life will then be of very short duration, in entire subservience to your will."

" My lord Pyrwater," said the physician, seeing the earl began to testify some outward signs of impatience, " my patient must not be thwarted—if he is, I cannot answer for his safety."

The earl seemed somewhat softened; he answered hastily—" My dear boy, you shall do whatever best pleases you; name only your wishes, and if it is in my power, be assured they shall be joyfully acceded to."

" You will find it, my lord," said the marquis, " no difficult task, I assure you; for I mean, in every instance, to obey my father's will. I am impatient, as soon as it shall please Heaven to restore me to health,

health, to be united to my cousin, lady Diana Wentworth, as was the desire of both my parents; and in order to offer her the affections of a heart, now hers alone, and for the speedy restoration of my health, I beg to be indulged with a voyage to Lisbon."

The earl of Pyrwater turned anxiously to the physician; his lordship's guilty conscience told him how vilely he had acted; he was afraid, from the various agents that had been employed in the late nefarious plot against Sophia, that remorse, desire of gaining the favour of the marquis, or a love of gossip, might bring his nephew acquainted with the truth, and he did not like to trust him at a distance from him; his own particular horror of the sea would not for a moment allow him to dwell on the idea of accompanying lord Rainsbury to Portugal.

At length he said to the physician—"I should think, sir—with all due deference

to your opinion, sir—I should think, that —that his lordship surely cannot be fit yet to undertake—to travel."

"Not exactly at this moment," said the physician, "but in a very few days he will be; and as I should, by that time, certainly recommend an entire change of air, there is certainly no spot more salubrious, nor more likely to effect an entire and prompt cure, than Lisbon. His lordship only now wants strength, and which he will soon gain there, by being under a fine, genial, unclouded atmosphere, and by taking a proper quantity of the pure unadulterated wines that he will be sure to find in Portugal."

"Thank you, my good sir," said the marquis, cordially pressing the hand of the doctor; "had you pronounced your fiat against this wish of my heart, I believe it would have been my death-warrant."

"But—but—" stammered out the earl, "your cousin may have left Lisbon as suddenly

denly as she went to that city; and then you will be running about after her till you kill yourself."

"I beg," said the good doctor, turning sternly to the earl of Pyrwater, "that there may be no more of this agitating controversy; see what a hectic you have already brought on my patient's cheek!"

"Oh, doctor, it does not hurt me, I assure you," said the marquis; "I have known severe disappointments, and I have borne them. I can be hurt no more by any that may befal me, and I can answer my uncle immediately on that head. I shall not run after my cousin, in my present weak state; nor till I have entirely recovered my health, do I mean to see her, even if she is at Lisbon."

"But why not? why not?" said the earl; "she may give you the slip again, and you may lose her, as you did before."

"I will take care of that," said lord Rainsbury; "but does your lordship think I am going to terrify her, by pre-

senting to her view a *spectre husband?* If I find she has left Lisbon for England, I shall come back as soon as possible, offer her my now-willing hand, and lead her to the altar, my lord, in your presence."

In a few days the marquis of Rainsbury set sail for Lisbon, where, after a pleasant voyage, he remained for a short time, daily recruiting his strength. He visited, on his convalescence, every place where he might be likely to see his cousin; he inquired of every family of rank, at the best hotels, among the resident English, at their pleasant villas, at Buenos Ayres, so named from its salubrious air and beautiful site, on the eminence overlooking the Tagus; but no one could give him any tidings of a lady Diana Wentworth. He resolved to visit Cintra and Almeida, and then, if his inquiries there proved fruitless, he would depart for Oporto.

He heard tidings of lady Diana, both at Cintra and Almeida, but sojourned at each place only a few days. At Almeida he heard

heard she was accompanied by a very handsome young man, with his arm in a sling; her sirname was not known. She was called there lady Diana, and something else; but what they could not recollect.

"Was it Wentworth?" asked his lordship.

"Oh no; it was a longer name than that."

"What was the gentleman's name?"

They did not know; they had never heard it; but the gentleman and lady seemed to live together quite like man and wife.

This certainly could not be his haughty cousin—there were other Dianas; and he set sail for Oporto. There he was told, a lady Diana Torrington, with two gentlemen, the lady's husband with a pair of eyes like two black beads, black hair, and ruddy complexion, with his arm in a sling, sailed for England only two

days before lord Rainsbury's arrival at Oporto.

What could the marquis possibly think of all this? At first he thought he should not feel very sorry if lady Diana and her friend sir Lucius were actually married; but *dark* and *ruddy* by no means accorded with the light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion, of sir Lucius.—"It must," thought lord Rainsbury, "be some other persons;" yet the description of the lady answered so exactly, and then Diana and Torrington were neither of them common names.

Lost in a crowd of conjectures, he remained but a short time at Oporto; and on his return to Lisbon, as, at the English hotel, he took up some newspapers, recently arrived, he saw, among the names of fashionable company at Bath, lady Diana Wentworth; and among the fashionable arrivals in London, sir Lucius Torrington.

To

To Bath then the noble Quixote resolved to repair; but first he thought it best, on his arrival in England, to repair to London, and consult his uncle on what he had heard.

He found the peer laid up with the gout, and labouring under a most violent attack of this rich man's disorder. Fearful of throwing it into his lordship's stomach, the marquis was silent as to the marriage of lady Diana, and merely said, that finding her ladyship had quitted Portugal, and seeing by the papers that she had arrived at Bath, he judged it best to quit Lisbon, now that he found himself perfectly recovered.

The marquis took the first leisure morning he could spare from his uncle's couch of agony to pay a visit to sir Lucius Torrington; and by going early, he hoped to find that modish gentleman at home. Accordingly, about twelve, one morning, vulgarly called noon, lord Rainsbury was admitted, and found the fashionable baronet

reclined on an ottoman, and dipping his toast in a cup of chocolate.

A mutual restraint was visible in the manner of both parties; and while the breakfast-hour passed in short desultory sentences, with long pauses of silence, sir Lucius rang for the removal of the numerous articles of which this dinner-like breakfast was profusely composed; the baronet having in vain entreated lord Rainsbury to make a second morning's meal.

After another long pause, the marquis said—"Can you spare me an hour, sir Lucius, this morning?"

"Certainly, my lord marquis," said sir Lucius—"two, three, if you wish. I am not going out this morning, and we will not be at home to any one. Indeed I am jaded to death."

"Pray," said the marquis, coldly, "do not close your doors, sir Lucius, on my account, against your morning visitors. I have not two hours to spare. I have had also as much fatigue of travelling as yourself,

self, and with less health to bear it; but I request of you, sir, to tell me where my cousin, lady Diana Wentworth, now is; or rather, I ought, I believe, to call her lady Diana ——"

His lordship had just commenced the name of Torrington, but the baronet hastily stopped him with—" A curious question, upon my soul! I am not your cousin's keeper, sir; and how should I know where she is?"

" Sir," said the marquis, " this is carrying the folly of fashion too far. You are too newly married for the wife to be in one place, and the husband in another; the husband too professing ignorance of even where his lady is. And, oh, sir Lucius! you knew my engagements to my cousin —every one knew them; and you stole her from me just when I was beginning to appreciate her worth, and when I could have gloried in the title of her protector, and not have declared myself ignorant, as you have done, of her destination, and

made your modern boast of not being your wife's keeper. Fie, sir Lucius! fie! Your lady is a female of an understanding too superior, however she may have given into fashionable follies, to be so soon treated with neglect."

Sir Lucius here burst into a loud laugh —"My dear fellow," said he, "for we will wave all form, and I will not think I am addressing the marquis of Rainsbury, but a man and a friend, I will not trifle with your feelings; but I cannot help, for the life of me, answering your formal speech in due order. In the first place, my lord, every one knew your engagements to your cousin, and I among the rest.—Granted. And every body knew too, and could very plainly see that you wished for nothing so much as to break them, even when the proud beauty *seemed* ready to favour your pretensions; and you might, perhaps, open your eyes to her merit, for she has much; and very likely you found out this merit too late. Her penetration was wonderfully acute;

acute; it is so still, and will be so to the end; and which has always enabled her to see that your heart has no share whatever in the engagement you might wish to form with her, in compliance with the will of parents. This union, I am convinced now, she never *will* agree to. Stop now till I have done, if you please, Rainsbury," seeing the marquis was about to interrupt him; "her ladyship knows well that heart of yours is given away, and can never be recalled; that Sophia Ashton, in spite of all that has happened, and of which nefarious business I have already heard fifty different accounts; but as to the unhappy young lady who is the victim, I believe, from my soul, that she is as innocent as an angel; and be she innocent or guilty, I am sure that *she* only will ever possess the true affection of the marquis of Rainsbury."

"What folly!" said the marquis; "or rather, let me call it subterfuge! Think you, sir, I would marry a woman whose

reputation must be for ever tarnished, if even we admit that she is not actually guilty? Is she a female to be hailed by the title my honoured mother bore, as marchioness of Rainsbury? No; if I still felt for her any lurking predilection in my heart, I should think each drop of blood that informed it would 'proclaim me bastard."

"Come, come," said sir Lucius, "I beseech you to descend from your heroics, and speak plain sober sense. Let me first answer your charges, man, and then condemn me. You say, I stole your cousin. Pardon me when I tell you, that I would not step over the threshold to steal her."

"Sir, you are married to her."

"Indeed I am not."

"What, then, sir, pray, took you to Lisbon, following her traces immediately after her strange mysterious departure?"

"I am, my lord marquis, accountable to no man for my actions; but a much nearer and dearer tie took me to Lisbon than

than lady Diana Wentworth. Her ladyship I esteem and honour; but we both know each other's tempers and pursuits too well ever to unite by the chains of matrimony, which, trust me, would never be silken ones to such as us; and we have often laughed when the ill-judging world has paired us together. Lady Diana Wentworth is formed by nature, though she does not know it, for all the delights of domestic life; her affections are warm and ardent, and her feelings more tender than she chooses to own: her strength of mind and understanding wonderful, and such as seldom falls to the lot of woman. But I am firmly attached to that love of notoriety which only captivates her for a moment, and which domestic happiness would cure her of in less than a twelvemonth. I hope I am not devoid of feeling, but it has not that fine tact as those of her ladyship; I love to see married people happy, but I feel a repugnance to enter the pale of matrimony myself."

"Sir

"Sir Lucius," said the marquis, gravely, "whatever reasons you may have for keeping your marriage private, know that I followed you to Oporto, where I heard of sir Lucius Torrington and lady Diana Torrington."

Here sir Lucius burst into a loud fit of laughter; nevertheless the marquis could not but perceive that there was a great embarrassment on the countenance, and in the manners, of the baronet; however, he stammered out—"Why, my lord, you well know—the—conspicuous kind of beauty, if I may so express myself—the high air of fashion—the—the—in short—the youth, the dignity, the—commanding attractions of lady Diana, which all required a protector—we—therefore—we—she—I mean—consented to honour the name of Torrington by adopting it, *pro tempore*—nothing more—nothing more."

"I pity your confusion," said the marquis, scornfully, "but I must beg, sir Lucius, that you will not trifle with me. Tell

Tell me, at once, without any kind of prevarication, is lady Diana Wentworth your wife, or is she not?"

"No, upon my honour!" said the baronet; "or, if you will not take that, as thinking mine too trifling a security, though, thank Heaven! it has never yet been tarnished, I swear, by the unstained honour of my noble ancestors, that lady Diana is not my wife, nor ever shall be, while I have breath: but, as I said before, a lady possessed of youth and beauty, I think right, in travelling, to borrow a name of a friend, as a protection, especially of one whom she might safely trust. I have the sincerest friendship for lady Diana; I appreciate her worth more than yourself can, my lord marquis, for all your ties of kindred: I think her a most inestimable woman, and one day you will say so. Lady Diana and I are really united; but it is by the most pure, the most chaste, and most sacred friendship—no power on earth could ever unite us in marriage."

The

The marquis presented his hand to the baronet, and said—"I am satisfied. However, sir Lucius, will you pardon my curiosity, if I ask you, who was the dark gentleman, with his arm in a sling, and of a ruddy complexion, that travelled with lady Diana? Had you worn a black wig, for a frolic, I should not at all have wondered at it; but then all the Portuguese, who could speak any English, said the gentleman's eyes were like two black beads."

Here the cheeks of sir Lucius became the colour of (we will not say the *damask* rose, as his fair complexion would not admit of a colour so refulgent); but certainly the beautiful rose of Provence, in its full bloom, did not equal the hue on the baronet's countenance. Lord Rainsbury perceived it; but the quick recovery of sir Lucius, though it did not prevent the marquis seeing there was some mystery attached to this black-eyed gentleman, yet he thought it better to *appear* satisfied,

satisfied, as sir Lucius, with a forced laugh, said—" Are we now to be told, my dear Rainsbury, how totally independent your cousin is? Who can attempt to watch her movements, or catch her as she flies? I can only speak of her as a fellow-traveller, and as her borrowing the name of Torrington, by my advice, on our departure from Portugal."

The marquis bowed, and, as we said before, *seemed* satisfied. Then taking his leave of sir Lucius Torrington, and, on his return home, finding his uncle better, he prepared for a pursuit of his fugitive bride-elect, by taking a journey to Bath.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VIII.

Retrograding. An unexpected Meeting.

We have stepped forward, out of the order of due time, because we shall have but little more of importance to mention concerning the marquis of Rainsbury till the conclusive part of this history. We must now follow the travellers in Normandy, where, at a lovely seat, called the Chateau de Roselle, situated at about five English miles distance from Caen, the virtuous fugitive family of the late truly-noble sir Edward Ashton retired from the contempt and scorn of a calumniating and unfeeling world.

We will pass over many trifling circumstances, totally uninteresting to our readers, and only serving to swell into a voluminous

minous bulk a very simple tale. We therefore leave a few short months unnoticed, and hasten on to the period of the following spring, when nature, in the delightful and fertile department of Calvados, begins early to display her beauties in the sweetly-scented primeval flowers, and the bright verdure of the grass gladdens the eye that delights to rest on its charming and sight-cheering colour.

Though the little Edgar Atheling required great care and watchfulness to guide his "first steps of life," yet he began to walk tolerably well, when led by one hand. Sophia, who was uncommonly fond of children, loved the beautiful boy as though it had been her own; and her mother, from seeing her excessive fondness, began to harbour doubts in her own mind, that, in spite of all she had said to the contrary, that the child *was* Sophia's own.—"It could only," she argued with herself, "be a mother that could shew so much love;

love; she had never been so overmuch wrapped up in stranger's children, especially when there was every reason to think they were no better than bastards." Thus communed the good lady with herself.

Though convinced of the affection of her sister, yet Sophia was proof against all the blandishments of Miss Ashton, which she unceasingly put in practice to extort the secret from her—a secret that, indeed, Sophia herself was deceived in, and knew not, scarcely, as may be said, what the one was that she was so strictly keeping.—"My sister," she would say, "I am bound by a solemn vow; therefore cease to question me: because, to whatever you may guess, I will neither answer yes nor no. I will only assure you this, my loved Eliza, that the child is not mine; and I solemnly declare before you, and in the face of Heaven, that I have never disgraced my family by improper conduct; and in regard to chastity, and the high

sense

sense I hope ever to retain of it, as the sure basis of female honour, I am worthy, my Eliza, of being your sister."

Miss Ashton was hurt at her sister's want of confidence in her; nevertheless she firmly believed that Sophia was perfectly innocent, as to her being the child's mother. Miss Ashton however was the least happy of all the exiles, notwithstanding the severe anxiety and fears of a mother truly virtuous and affectionate, and who continually thought within herself, that she was justly punished for her partiality to one who had proved herself a faulty child, and brought a stigma on her family, and hurt the fair promise of a sister, who, though she felt not to love so well, was infinitely more virtuous than her naughty favourite.

Miss Ashton, though highly admired by flattering Frenchmen—though eagerly sought after in retirement by all the higher classes, yet seclusion was the choice of every member of this family. The canker-

worm

worm of sorrow preyed silently and secretly on the bosom of every individual, and Miss Ashton gave many a sigh to the gay scenes which she had heretofore been accustomed to adorn; and she often said, she thought it better not to be at all, than to be excluded from that hemisphere where she could not but be conscious she had once shone as one of the most brilliant constellations. Her music, her drawing, for the first several weeks she was in Normandy, engrossed much of her time; but even the practice of these accomplishments lost its charm.—"Where," she would ask herself, "was the wonted applause, and the enthusiastic admiration, that the display of these endowments was accustomed to obtain?" No more royalty itself hung over her chair, delighted, and almost afraid to breathe, while she scientifically sung the Italian bravura, and struck with delicacy and skill the strings of her harp: no more, at her mother's dinner-parties, before the company descended

to

to the dining-parlour, did she see the first connoisseurs in painting standing in raptures before some fine historical piece, the work of her skilful hand. What eyes now followed her majestic form, as she paced the brilliantly-lighted saloon, or threaded the mazy dance amongst the admiring members of the noble society at Almack's? Eliza's "occupation was gone."

Yet in adversity the heart sometimes becomes better. She felt fully sensible of Ayscough's worth; nay, more, she preferred him now before all men she had ever seen. She no longer trifled with him, and she severely blamed herself for the early predilection she had felt for a handsome clerical coxcomb, whose chief mental qualifications consisted in a sharp and satirizing wit, a propensity to which she had herself been eminent for; so that when, in former times, she and the reverend Mr. Elderton were seen seated together, those young people of fashion who had been just brought out, together with those who

who had preserved, through the brazen scene, any remains of diffidence, used to say, as they passed before these two wits, what the members of the court of Lewis XIV. said, when passing the windows of the scrutinizing and witty madame de Montespan—"That they had just been *running the gauntlet!*"

Since the heart of Miss Ashton had been given to the excellent and ever-kind Ayscough, she began to see the danger and mischief of satiric wit, and to have rather more regard to the feelings of others. He made her see the excellent qualities of a virtuous mother's heart, however obscured by ignorance and a want of education; he taught her, though indirectly, the duty and veneration due to so indulgent a parent, and how misplaced was every jest, when directed against her. Her own excellent understanding told her, that the reverend Pomfret Elderton was no credit to his cloth, as he gave eagerly into every fashionable folly which touches

touches too close on vice to be adopted by him who is to teach the ways of purity, religion, and humble hope. On these things Miss Ashton would often reflect, for she had frequently read over the note signed "*Clericus*," wherein she was entreated not to give her hand in marriage to Ayscough till after the Arlington masquerade; and though at times an emotion of former love would dart across her bosom, she blamed herself for having been persuaded by such a billet.—"Oh!" thought she, "had Ayscough been my legal protector then, perhaps my sister would not have been the victim of some cruel and secret enemy; for something seems to tell me, that there was a conspiracy in this business particularly aimed against Ayscough, to destroy his marriage with me; and a marriage with him I would willingly contract this moment, but that I have vowed never to give myself to Ayscough till the fame of my sister is re-established. Alas! I see but little hopes of that; for if

 only

only a tenth part of the world is judicious enough to believe her innocent, the other major part will deem her guilty, and the story will continue to be, as it has been already, told fifty different ways, and all ending in Miss Sophia Ashton's having had a child. I am sure that wicked Mrs. Horton is concerned in this nefarious plot; I well recollect her insinuations the last morning visit she paid my mother, implying that Ayscough loved Sophia better than me. Vile woman! Sophia is a very obstinate girl; but I am well assured that the sweet creature is innocent, as purity itself, of any lapse from chastity." She then again perused the note from *Clericus*, put it into the letter-case she always carried about her, and ringing for her maid, told her to accompany her in a walk towards the ruined abbey of Ardennes.

Passing through a beautiful verdant spot, plentifully besprinkled with the little wild purple lily of Palestine, Miss Ashton desired her maid to stop and gather some,

and,

and, if she could, take up two or three roots of them, and try to make them grow in their garden. Miss Ashton continued to walk forward, while her waiting-woman was thus employed. She had not gone many paces alone before she saw a man coming towards her, who had a clerical appearance; and as he drew nearer, she soon recognised the reverend Pomfret Elderton. Retreat was impossible—they were obliged to address each other; and Eliza, though she heartily wished this meeting had never taken place, and had fancied herself cured, when, in fact, she was not entirely free from some slight predilection for the first object of her girlish affections, felt an emotion, not altogether painful, at the sight of a being critically handsome, and whom she once fervently wished to invest with the title of her lord and master.—"He is now poor," thought she, "and I am ungenerous enough totally to withdraw my regard from him." His dejected looks, as he met her eyes,

were half-feigned, it is true; for, though he had always admired Miss Ashton, he admired her large fortune more than her person; and now, he thought, what a precious prize she would be to a needy man, if he could but supplant the happy Ayscough! He began, therefore, in a pitiable strain of commonplace jargon, generally used on such occasions, and finished, as it turned out, in a very bungling manner, because it was calculated to rouse all the native pride of the lady he was addressing —"The cruel world, Miss Ashton," said he, "has blazoned the adventure of your sister's *faux-pas* through all the higher circles in the English metropolis, till it has at length reached me in my retirement. Appearances are certainly most glaring against her; yet, for the sake of my charming Eliza, if she will only consent to make me blessed, by calling her mine, I will not only lead her forth triumphant before that world of fashion she is formed, and destined then, I hope, to adorn hereafter as the viscountess

countess Belmour; but her sister, however her name may be tarnished by the late event, shall make one of our family; and if the nobles of the land do not choose to receive the sister-in-law of a man of such high descent as myself, they, in their turn, shall not be noticed by me."

Here Miss Ashton, with her usual pride and dignity of manner, regarded the clerical boaster from top to toe, and, with a scornful laugh, she said—" Upon my word, sir, I have no ambition to rise to the rank of viscountess Belmour by the death of a worthy nobleman, from whom, I am sorry to say, his descendant has much degenerated. I thank you, in the name of my sister, for your offers of *protecting* her; but such protection she does not stand in need of. Her fame, I trust, will soon be established, as fair as ever, to the confusion of her enemies, through the noble exertions of that most generous of men whom I shall shortly call my husband."

"Cruel Eliza!" said Mr. Elderton, with a desponding look.

"Rather call yourself cruel," said Miss Ashton; "had it not been for this note, sir," added she, taking the paper from her letter-case, "I should, at the duchess of Arlington's masquerade, have had a legal protector, whom no one would have dared to offend. As I was once foolish enough to afford you those hopes which my real friends would, I believe, have been very loth to have ratified, I still added to my folly, in according you the pity you sued for, in delaying my marriage with Mr. Ayscough till after the masquerade; and for which compliance I am now a sufferer. There, sir, take back your note; you have no letters of mine, nor do I wish to preserve this now only written memorial of yours in my hands."

Elderton glanced over the note.—"Me the writer of this note!" exclaimed he. "I declare I knew not that your marriage with Mr. Ayscough was absolutely determined

mined on. I had also sent my baggage to France, and was preparing to follow, long before the masquerade of the duchess of Arlington took place; at which, had I been in England, I certainly should not have appeared; for I would rather go to a public entertainment of that kind where I should be certain of not being known, than amongst a circle of private friends, who would be sure to find one out by some means or other. But I declare, Miss Ashton, upon my honour, though I knew the duchess had planned such an entertainment, I did not know what guests she had invited, or meant to invite."

Eliza looked incredulous, and Mr. Elderton, bending on one knee, said—"Hear me, madam, in the face of Heaven, and before its Almighty Ruler, most solemnly declare, that I know nothing of this letter, and that it is the first time I ever beheld it."

"I believe you, sir," said Miss Ashton; "and I see a wicked plot in this whole

transaction, to prevent my marriage with Mr. Ayscough, and to strike at my happiness, by wounding the hitherto-spotless fame of my beloved sister."

Elderton walked beside the fair female he had irrevocably lost, and the certainty of that loss added much to her attractions. He dropped unfeigned tears over the note; and taking a letter from his pocketbook, which he was just going to send off to the viscount Belmour, his near relation in England, he said, presenting it to Miss Ashton—"Have the goodness to compare that handwriting, in the direction of that letter, with that of this note—is there the least resemblance in the characters?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Ashton; "yet, though I am willing to believe the truth of the solemn assertions you have just made, there is, as I have been told, often disguise of handwriting employed on such occasions."

"But I do not think that this *is* disguised," said Mr. Elderton, "for I am certain

certain I know the hand; and if I was in England, I could make a good use of this note. But I owe more than a thousand pounds in London; and if the viscount, my uncle, does not become security for me, as I have requested him, I cannot shew my face there at present."

Eliza felt much affected; she knew that she had more than a thousand pounds she could command and could spare; yet delicacy towards this proud man, but more particularly what she owed to herself, prevented her from offering, even as a loan, what would be of such infinite relief.—"He will imagine," thought she, "that I am in love with him, if I make such an offer, and I must not commit this imprudence. If I was to send it to him anonymously, it would be discovered, for there is no one whom I can trust." She was much relieved by his saying—"You are meditating, Miss Ashton; and so was I. I should rather my uncle would become my security to my creditors, than that he

should send me a present of five or six hundred pounds; for if he should, which is not unlikely, and though I could, I know, make up the rest myself, yet, I am sure, when that sum came from the old boy, I never could resist the temptation of spending every farthing of it in the pleasurable capital of this delightful country."

"Trifling, unprincipled man!" thought Eliza—"oh! how happy am I, that I have transferred my affections to a more worthy object!"

"However," resumed Mr. Elderton, "I will send off this letter to Mr. Ayscough, whom I have frequently met at the St. James's Coffeehouse, and at a few private parties; and I will let him know what I think of it."

Eliza blushed deeply: she saw through the art of Elderton, and desired he would not trouble Mr. Ayscough with such nonsense. He then very respectfully gave the note into her hands, desiring her to destroy it, if she wished; and that he should

write

write to the person who, he felt certain, had penned it, flatly accusing him with it —"For, alas!" added he, "though I find, too lovely Miss Ashton! that I must renounce all pretensions to that dear hand, yet, I think, through that vile scroll, I shall be able, perhaps, to find a clew to a deep-laid plot against the peace of your family, and have some claim to your future friendship. On the subject of my still-unchanged and ever-ardent love, I will not presume to address you; but suffer me to pay my respects to lady Ashton and your sister, and honour me, most lovely of women, by calling me your friend!"

"We admit no visitors, sir," said Miss Ashton; "our society is confined to a very few, who are select and real friends."

"Cruel Miss Ashton!" said he, "what! will you then banish me from your presence, when I have told you that I hope to be of assistance in discovering your enemies, by means of that paper?"

"Should you hear any thing satisfactory relating to it," said Eliza, "I will thank you, sir, to address a few lines to my mother."

"Your mother!" repeated Elderton. "Oh, my ever dear Miss Ashton! our innocent correspondence——"

"What correspondence, sir, had you ever with me?"

"Pardon me, that dawning of attachment, fervent on my side, and continually increasing, and which I hoped time would ripen in yours, was, I too well remember, disapproved by lady Ashton. I know she never liked me, and that note would discover I had some influence over you, and might produce an unpleasant scene between the good lady and yourself."

Eliza, blushing deeply with shame and vexation, consigned the note to her letter-case; and though her voice faltered, she preserved her resolute dignity of manner, saying—"I have nothing to fear from my mother's seeing this note, whether your own,

own, or written by any other. I have no secrets from my mother." Then calling her maid, who had stood aloof, but who had heard every word almost that had been said, with a distant curtsey, she bade the fashionable divine good-morning.

What a busy conflict now took place in the bosom of Eliza Ashton on her return home. She had seen and conversed with the man whom she had once preferred to all the world, though her ambition had prompted her, for a short time, to attempt the conquest of the marquis of Rainsbury. She felt, in spite of all her efforts, that some sparks of the flame Elderton had kindled in her bosom yet remained unextinguished; she compared his air of fashion, his irresistible beauty of countenance, against the manly and serious appearance of the dark-eyed Ayscough—that eye that could be terribly severe in admonition, yet at times tender as the dove's—the continual fascination of Elderton's eye—that certain elegance diffused over

over his whole exterior, which seemed imperiously to call on every votary of fashion to aim, at least, to catch each of his looks, and all the winning grace of his courtly, yet easy manners. All these outward excellencies did she contrast with the contempt often seen on the severe brow of Ayscough at the folly of fashion's slaves. Yet how beautiful, how finely arched, was that brow! and the open forehead bespoke worth, candour, and wisdom. When that intelligent eye rested on her form, it spoke only the language of love; it made the conquests of its owner sure, and captivated by the chastened eloquence of its expression: that look now presented itself to the memory of Eliza, and she fancied she saw him as he gazed on her before he put on his mask, as he disguised himself, on that never-to-be-forgotten evening, as a Hindoo priest. She put her hands before her eyes, not only to enjoy the recollection of the past, but a sense of present shame stole across her proud bosom, that

she

she could allow herself, for one instant, to draw a comparison between characters so totally opposite.

She read the note again and again, and sickened at the idea of confiding her folly to her mother.—"Alas!" thought she, "my poor mother means well, there is no doubt; but she is so shockingly ignorant, that were I to throw myself on her bosom, bathed in tears, and try to make her the depository of my love-secrets, what sort of soothings, what consolation, am I to expect from her! Not such as is given to the beautiful heroine of some modern novel, who blushingly imparts, with many tears, the fond affections of her virgin heart to her indulgent mother; neither am I calculated to act such a whining part. No, I must read this note to her, and tell her my tale as well and as plainly as I can."

In spite, however, of Miss Ashton's pride, she trembled when she reached the dressing-room of her mother, and she was just

just going to tap at the door; but she so shuddered at the idea of acquainting her ladyship with her having so long concealed this note from her knowledge, that she hastened back to her own apartment, and at that moment resolved to destroy it, and say nothing about it. But, on cooler reflection, she thought—" If this man should write to my mother any intelligence he might chance to receive concerning it, I shall appear yet more culpable. Oh, what is all my boasted independence! where is my determination of acting as I please, and of never consenting to be subject to any one? I have condescended to deal in a sly and underhanded manner, unworthy the great mind for which I aspired to be famed; and I now tremble at the idea of being discovered, like a poor, cowardly wretch. Well, well, there is no hurry. I will take the first fair opportunity of telling my mother of my folly, but I will not tell her to-day."

A fair

A fair opportunity, however, did very soon present itself, and Miss Ashton was resolved to embrace it. The little Edgar had a slight indisposition, and his medical attendant had recommended frequent carriage-airings. Sophia, who could never bear him out of her sight, went with the child and his nurse in the carriage. Lady Ashton was never fond of going out with Edgar, when her daughter accompanied him with all that she thought a *mother's* fondness; and Miss Ashton declined going, because now, she thought, nothing should prevent her from making her confession to her mother.

But Miss Ashton's revealment of her own folly was not given in that humble and gentle style, which, on the same account, would have marked the demeanour of her lovely sister. On the contrary, Eliza sat pouting and frowning, and hardly afforded an answer to the commonplace remarks which her mother addressed to her, concerning the fine weather, and the forwardness

forwardness of the spring; and she finished by taking her mother's favourite Angola cat off the sofa, where puss lay sporting, as happy as possible.

"Lauk, Betsy!" said lady Ashton, "you seem in a very queerish kind of humour this morning. Pray, what has that poor dumb beast done to you?" Her ladyship then rang the bell.—"Thomas, bring in the *Angular* cat. There, put her down on the *Otterman.* I'd have you to know, Miss, I'll not have my favourites *arranged* and made uncomfortable to please your ill-humours."

"I had something I wished to disclose to you, my lady, this morning."

"Well, my dear, speak."

This kindness smote Miss Ashton, and she said—"I fear, madam——"

"Come, come," said the good lady, "let me not have this ceremony of my lady and madam—call me your mother; I am sure I have always tried to be an indulgent one to you both. Ah!" added she,

she, with a deep sigh, "but how *has* my cares been returned?"

Miss Ashton here burst into tears.—"Oh, my dear mother!" said she, "you have indeed been indulgent, but I have been very faulty. You know the reverend Mr. Elderton was once a favourite of mine, and I was foolish enough——"

"To do what?" said lady Ashton, impatiently, taking off her spectacles, which she had put on to aid her in the spelling over an English newspaper.

"Give me but time, my lady," said Miss Ashton, again resuming her ill-humour, at her ladyship thus crossing her, "and I will come to the point as soon as possible; but if you are to stop me in the middle of a sentence, I shall never have done. Do you recollect my putting off my marriage with Mr. Ayscough till after the duchess of Arlington's masquerade?"

"Ah, indeed, I believe I do!" said lady Ashton, "and the more's the pity; if you had

had given him a *regal* right to be your *purtector*, instead of being so in that silly sham priest's dress, it would have been much better. But, however, God knows I always loved to comply with my children's wishes when I could; and I thought it a proof of your virtuous modesty as would not let you like to go to such a higgledy-piggledy, *hodge-podge* scene as a masquerade, so soon after being made a bride."

"Ah, dear mamma!" said Miss Ashton, "you thought so then, but it was no such thing; I put off my marriage to oblige, as I thought, Mr. Elderton."

"What! on the point of marriage with the very best man in the world, and to still go on with encouraging that coxcomb of a parson, who, if he'd his *desarts*, would have his gown stripped over his ears to-morrow! and you for to go for to do any thing to oblige him, and act such a *baste* part against that worthy Mr. Ayscough! Oh, dear! oh, dear! my daughters will bring

bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave!"

"My dear mamma," said Miss Ashton, endeavouring to take her mother's hand, which the good lady twitched away, "stop till they *are* grey. By that time I hope you will glory in both your daughters. Give some encouragement to my sincerity; I claim it as my due, though I am sorry I deferred this proof of it so long."

"Talk of *both* my daughters, indeed!" said lady Ashton. "I am sure that Sophia is a little wicked hussy. I did however think I had one virtuous daughter; but I see you will all take the part of one another, and God knows, I believe Solomon was right when he said, '*Who can find a virtuous woman?*"

"My dear mother," said Miss Ashton, "do not say that—who could ever call the virtue of lady Ashton in question?" The lady drew up her head.—"And, oh, my dear, dear mother! do not harbour a thought,

thought, I beseech you, against the purity of my beloved sister!"

She then took out her letter-case, and gave the note, signed "*Clericus*," into the hands of her mother; and though lady Ashton's wrath was again kindled, so as to make her give her daughter what is called a good trimming for her imprudence, and though Miss Ashton could with difficulty obtain a patient hearing concerning her late meeting with Mr. Elderton, when lady Ashton chose to remark, that she supposed all this intrigue was begun again between her and that abominable parson; yet, at length, Miss Ashton, with great difficulty, and with some of her former insolence of manner, to which she was provoked by her mother's ignorant prejudices, obtained a patient hearing; and her ladyship felt pleased at the conclusion, as she flattered herself another clew was found to the development of the plot formed against the fame and happiness of poor Sophia.

"Indeed,"

"Indeed," said lady Ashton, "indeed, I must say, Betsy, I did not *suspect* so much open dealing from you."

"Why, mamma," said the young lady, "had you ever any reason to think me a crafty character?"

"No, no," said lady Ashton, "quite the *contrary*, I must say; but only I know this, that you never before would own yourself in the wrong. I wish to think well of your sister, God knows; my poor heart has been almost broken by this business; and guilty or not, I must say I I love you better than ever I did afore, for your *infection* for your sister, poor unhappy girl!"

Miss Ashton pouted, and was ready to shew all her turbulent spirit at the commencement of her mother's serious reflections. The conclusion however caused a smile to come over her countenance; and we must do Miss Ashton the justice of saying, that it was *not now* a smile of ridicule.

CHAP-

CHAPTER IX.

An Extraordinary Event.

We left the marquis of Rainsbury fully determined to renew his Quixotic pursuit of his fair cousin, by following her to Bath. To catch this fugitive lady seemed indeed a difficult task; for, in answer to his lordship's greetings in the pump-room, and his inquiries if his friends had seen lady Diana Wentworth, the answer was —"Oh, yes! but she left Bath, about three days ago, with the intention of going to Normandy."

"To Normandy!" echoed the marquis.

"Oh, yes!" replied a pert Miss of five-and-thirty, highly rouged, and like the Celias and Hymeneas, at the commencement of this century, in search of a husband.

band.—"You must know, I am sure, my lord marquis," added she, with a girlish air, "that lady Diana can never remain long anywhere; and now she is really become so restless, that I could almost fancy she is in love. I hope it is with your lordship, as I understand you were intended, by your parents, for each other."

"To Normandy!" muttered lord Rainsbury, as he stood deeply musing, without having paid the least attention to the latter part of the voluble spinster's remarks.

"Dear, my lord!" said Miss Staniford, "why should that so much astonish you? The Ashtons, you know, set the fashions here; and as the French are free and easy beings, I dare say they have brought Normandy into fashion."

"Lady Diana! the Ashtons!" said his lordship, again muttering to himself, and giving an involuntary shudder.

Miss Staniford was not afraid of madmen, but she began to fancy that his lordship evinced some symptoms of lunacy;

 she,

she therefore resolved to rouse him.—"But, perhaps," said she, with a malignant sneer, "lady Diana is gone to enjoy *retirement* in France—that seems now the order of the day. Poor dear Paris will, by-and-by, I expect, with all its attractions, be quite neglected. Consider the two beauties of the Ashton family now residing in Normandy with Miss Sophia's little Cupid, who, it is said, promises to be as handsome as its Medicean mother. Ah!" added she, with a deep-drawn sigh, "poor, dear sir Edward Ashton! how would his worthy heart have been pained, had he lived to witness such a dereliction from chastity in his family!"

"You knew then sir Edward personally?" said the marquis; "do you recollect him well?"

"Oh, perfectly! sweet-tempered, worthy, elegant gentleman!"

"Oh! I thought you had been too young," said his lordship, looking quizzically at her highly-varnished countenance;

nance; and turning from her, just as she was commencing the sentence of—"To be sure she was but very little then," he joined a party of ladies, who were seated near to where the waters are given. Here, while he was leaning over the seat of one of the ladies, he happened to look up, and he met the intelligent glances which beamed from the blue eyes of the duchess of Arlington. He blushed scarlet deep; all the masquerade scene rushed on his anguished memory, and he would fain have withdrawn his looks, and have made good his retreat; but now good-breeding compelled him to go over to the side where the duchess was placed, and to pay his respects to her, especially as she had beckoned him, with her usual captivating ease of manner, and with one of her most fascinating smiles.

"Allow me," said her grace, without pretending to notice his visible embarrassment, "to congratulate your lordship on your recovery from your late alarming ill-

ness, and on your return from your late excursions. Let me claim the privilege of an old acquaintance, by asking you to take me out of this crowd, and we will together make a more agreeable promenade. Let us," added she, with the most winning familiarity, " make our escape together—I have a thousand things to say to you."

The first moments of their walk passed away in silence, or in a few desultory remarks. At length the duchess said—" I have seen your cousin, lady Diana Wentworth, here."

" Have you?" eagerly asked the marquis.

And the duchess, fearful that the restraint which limited their conversation to question and answer might continue till their arrival at her house, where, all the remainder of the morning which she had to spare, she passed with her husband in his library, her constant rule when not in London, she continued, saying—" I know not

not what to make of her; but never, surely, was a young creature so altered: a fixed and touching melancholy has now succeeded to that peculiar animation which once sat on a countenance that was most various in its expression, and which was such, that no painter, however eminent in his art, could ever find it possible to catch her likeness. I will not say, that the undaunted air she sometimes assumed sat well on her as a female; but certainly melancholy does not become her. I shall never forget the morning she called here on me, to take her leave, when she informed me she was going to Normandy. Her eyes were red with weeping, and she pressed my hand in mournful silence; indeed she appeared at first as if speech, as well as tears, were denied her. I embraced her, and entreated her to confide her sorrows to me; for I saw, as I told her, that something weighed heavily on her mind. We have always been confidential friends, though she is several years

younger than myself. She shook her head, and placed her hand on her heart, as if all her woes centered there. I began to rally her, to see if I could make her smile, and told her she was in love. This caused her to weep, and that abundantly —I was not sorry, however, for I knew it would relieve her. Amidst her sobs, I heard her utter distinctly, '*Lost to me!*' Now, my lord marquis, I hope it is not you," added the duchess, with a smile, "that lady Diana is hopelessly in love with! I trust her ladyship's love is bestowed on one that will some day have gratitude sufficient to appreciate her worth —and she has much."

"Heaven grant that it *may* be myself!" said the marquis, with energy. "I can assure your grace, that I now adore my cousin; would that I had sooner been sensible of her worth!"

"Rainsbury, Rainsbury!" said the duchess, seriously, "have a care how you act; be not rash—you know not your own heart;

heart; I have watched its movements—I know where it has strayed, and even where it still hovers, in spite of appearances, which, however glaring at present, I yet feel a hope, I sometimes am afraid to cherish, may be cleared up. Believe me, your cousin, lady Diana, is not the female to make you happy; and you never did, worthy as she may be of your affection, nor ever will, love her more than with that tender esteem that the ties of kindred demand. My dear young friend, do not offer to your cousin a divided heart—she merits its whole sacrifice. Cease, I beg of you, to pursue her; and wait the development of a mystery at present attached to her conduct, and in which I think you have no part—leave the unravelling of this to time."

"I certainly," said the marquis, "do not mean to pursue my cousin into Normandy; prudence, for many reasons, would forbid my taking that step. I imagine her stay there will not be long. I shall

return to town the first opportunity, for lord Pyrwater has not quite recovered his last attack of the gout. By my father's will, I owe my uncle that duty, which, I am sorry to say, is performed more in compliance with that will than from my heart; however, the time is now very near, when I shall be at full liberty to act as I please."

"And then," said the duchess, smiling, "will you then hold in the same mind as to your marriage?"

"I will certainly," said the marquis, firmly, "marry my cousin, if she will have me."

The general idea prevailed that there was no fear of the lady refusing: the duchess of Arlington did not coincide in that idea; but then her grace, though a woman ranking high as a lady of the first fashion, was never swayed by general opinion.

Leaving the duchess at Bath, and sending lord Rainsbury to town, we shall now

now again transport our readers to Roselle.

A temporary tranquillity had, for some few days after Miss Ashton's confession, diffused itself over the calumniated Sophia, and her sympathizing family, at that delightful chateau. Ayscough was expected every week, and Eliza looked forward to his arrival with much pleasure. His letters however had not been satisfactory; he could find no clew to guide this worthy and unfortunate family through the dreadful labyrinth into which they had been thrown by the arts of the wicked and designing. He had in vain, though backed by the entreaties of lady Ashton and her daughter, supplicated Sophia to allow him to insert an advertisement in the public journals, detailing the whole circumstance, and offering an immense reward for the discovery of the offenders, wisely alleging that it was impossible to give more publicity to the affair than it had already. This however Sophia ob-

stinately refused, and firmly declared that death only should separate her and the child; and that if her family offered to make this a public grievance, she would, with the dear boy, separate herself for ever from the rest of her family, and live by the exertion of her talents till she came of age, when she knew there was no proviso in her father's will to prevent her succeeding to her fortune—at least so her mother had often told her.

"I don't know that, Miss Pert," said lady Ashton; "your father left me sole *guardianess* and *exekewteress* of his will—so I'd have you take care what you does."

"My dear mamma," said Sophia, bursting into tears, for her effort to shew an independent spirit had cost her much, "be not offended—be assured I have no wish to set myself in opposition against you; but nothing shall tear this infant from me. Leave him and me in this retirement—it is all I will ever ask of you.

Let

Let not my sister, with her brilliant and untainted reputation, live any longer in exile. Oh, my Eliza! bestow your hand on a worthy man, and leave your sister to the care of an ever-watchful Providence, who, something seems to assure me, will one day make my innocence appear as fair as ever."

"Never, never," said Eliza, "until that innocence is brought to light, will I give my hand in marriage; though, be assured, to no one but Ayscough shall it ever *be* given."

There were moments in which suspicions had arisen in the mind of Ayscough, to the prejudice of Mrs. Horton; yet, as he visited her occasionally, in hopes of finding out something through her means, in some unguarded moment, her constant good-nature assured his naturally-unsuspecting mind, that she never could have had any hand in so diabolical a plot; indeed he looked on her capacity as too bounded, and her indiscretion such, as

no one would be willing to trust her with the conducting of any important secret. He reflected not, that when he first knew her, she was a wild, good-humoured, romping, young hoyden—that was before depravity had taught her the stratagems of vice; nor did he reflect how much a certain degree of low cunning, set on to work by disappointed passion, is capable of putting in practice. Mrs. Horton had failed in her second attempt on Ayscough's heart; she found, even after the masquerade plan to mar his happiness, that he was more devoted to Miss Ashton than before; she therefore was actuated towards him by no other motive than the blackest revenge; she had imbibed all the worst passions of the natives of the East, without one of their virtues.

Lady Netterville did not, in any degree, excite the suspicions of Ayscough, nor that she had been one of the chief abettors in the cruel plot against Sophia, because the continual babbling, he thought,

of

of her tongue, was such, that she knew not how to keep it still at any time. In the summer she had gone to her country-seat, that is, the fashionable summer, being autumn; and she would certainly, Ayscough reflected, tell all she knew so many months before she took her departure for the country. He was not aware of the depth of lady Netterville's intriguing mind. She knew when to speak, and when to hold her tongue. This conduct, together with her wealth, made her always cherished by the numerous coteries of fashionable gossip with which London abounds. She had, as we have before observed, imbibed this love of scandal from her very cradle; it grew with her growth; and though naturally licentious, scandal was her darling sin. Well educated, and always ambitious of being in the first circles, she knew, by a certain style of manner, to make that venomous qualification agreeable, and to conceal the poison it carried with it; she could always time it well;

well; and she could, on occasion, converse without it. Her company, therefore, even by people not much addicted to take delight in the gossip of the day, was often more courted than shunned.

There never, however, did one momentary thought arise in the mind of Ayscough that Sophia could be guilty, though he thought her conduct extremely strange and mysterious. He had no idea of the source of her motives, for of that source he was totally ignorant; so was her sister, though now and then a vague suspicion shot across the breast of her mother, and at those times she was always uncommonly cross to the poor little innocent Edgar; and which conduct gave to Sophia, at those times, all the suspicious appearance of a doting and angry young parent.

As to the marquis of Rainsbury, the poor calumniated Sophia felt assured that she was now deprived for ever of that predilection he had felt in her favour, nor had she the smallest chance of ever regaining

gaining it. She found, on examining her own heart, that she loved him better than she was before conscious of.—"Cut off," she would say to herself, "from forming any other honourable connexion, for his sake I will lead a single life—no other man could I endure to call my husband; and who, that has any proper regard for his name, or even for his own dignity as a man, would wish to unite his fate with mine? A wretch stained with infamy! however undeserving, Heaven knows how truly undeserving, my name is branded with ignominy, never to be wiped off!"

The marquis indeed felt convinced of her guilt, but he still loved her, fondly loved her, though he endeavoured to persuade himself he did not.—"Oh! had he not," he would think, "a written proof concerning this child, before it made its unwelcome appearance in so public a manner?" He covered the face of the picture that he had possessed himself of, representing the beauteous Sophia, which he had

had snatched from Miss Ashton's portfolio of drawings; and which he had, till the evening he went to the duchess of Arlington's masquerade, constantly worn next his heart; but by one of that kind of ideas which sometimes come across the mind, he felt fearful he might lose it, and he locked it up, in a small casket, with some other valuables.

After he came to his reason, when the frenzied fever of his brain had subsided, he gave one look at it.—"Is it possible," said he to himself, "that any dereliction from modesty could take place in the mind and conduct of one whose outward appearance seems compounded of delicacy and chastity? Oh! let me not think—let me endeavour to banish from my memory those thoughts which bring forth only madness!" Yet he read again the mutilated note he had found at the Exhibition, as if he was resolved to confirm himself in the idea he had formed of her certain culpability; and then sealing it up with

with the picture, in a small parcel, he wrote on it, "To be delivered to Miss Sophia Ashton, when I am no more."

The two fair recluses of Normandy now amused themselves with their various accomplishments, and their evenings and mornings were generally passed in the lovely and rural walks with which the vicinity of the chateau abounded; when, one morning, they beheld, walking at a short distance from them, leaning on the arm of a gentleman, a very elegant-looking lady, with whose air and features they were certain they were well acquainted. The lady appeared to be in very earnest conversation, and the subject seemed a serious one to both parties.

"If that fair dame did not look so melancholy," said Miss Ashton, "I should take her for lady Diana Wentworth."

Sophia looked at her again.—"Oh, I am sure it is lady Diana!" said she; "I have often seen her look very serious, and then her face had always a melancholy expression.

expression. It is almost impossible to be mistaken in her figure and her style of dress—it is certainly her. Let us make haste home before we are seen."

The gentleman and lady now turned off towards the road that led to the right, and the sisters hastened to regain the chateau, taking care not to stir out the two following days.

On the third evening after this rencontre, a loud ringing was heard at the garden-gate, near the small saloon, where lady Ashton and her daughters generally sat.—"Surely that must be Mr. *Hascoff*," said lady Ashton.

"No," said Eliza, "I am certain he will not come till next week."

Conjecture however was soon at an end, by the servant's entrance with a note for lady Ashton, saying that a man on horseback waited at the gate for an answer. The note was as follows:—

"Lady

"Lady Diana Wentworth presents her friendly respects to lady Ashton and her daughters, and hopes they will not exclude her from their presence, nor deny her the pleasure of contributing her mite of friendship and affection to their hours of seclusion. Lady Diana supplicates for the favour of being allowed to call on lady Ashton. Oppressed by sorrow herself, it has taught lady Diana to feel much for the injured in misfortune; and she hopes that no fastidious ceremony, or pride of conscious rectitude, will prevent lady Ashton and her daughters from accepting that consolation which a fellow-sufferer is anxious to bestow. The bearer will wait for an answer."

There was no time for deliberation; an answer must be written immediately. Lady Ashton, who never liked the impudent puss, as she generally called her, would not hear of her intimacy, "which," she

she said, "she plainly saw she wanted to establish."

Miss Ashton was equally averse to her ladyship's acquaintance; for there had always been a coldness between these two independent-spirited beauties.

Sophia had, for some time before her misfortune, been the object of lady Diana's warm regard; and an enthusiast in friendship, the lovely victim of slander had returned her ladyship's affection in a two-fold degree. She therefore now urged the advantage of receiving her visits—"It would shew," she said, "that they were still respected; for, however free might be lady Diana Wentworth's manners, she was always very particular in the choice of her female acquaintance."

"Respected, indeed!" said lady Ashton; "why such an *imperent* hussy as she would not care what or who she visited, if she took it in her head, though she's as proud as Lucifer himself. Betsy, child, go on with what you was writing."

Miss

Miss Ashton, therefore, having been deputed amanuensis on this occasion, finished the following answer:—

"Lady Ashton and her daughters are much obliged by the offer of lady Diana Wentworth's society, which, in happier times, they better knew how to appreciate; but those ladies who knew them in that honourable and highly-exalted circle in which lady Ashton and her daughters were accustomed to move, they must decline receiving at present; as retirement, and seclusion from their former acquaintance, urged them to choose this place for their residence; from which, it is hoped, mistaken kindness, and the apparent desire of *honouring* them by notice, will not drive them to seek a quiet asylum elsewhere."

While a weight seemed taken off the mind

mind of lady Ashton and her eldest daughter, when this answer was dispatched, Sophia felt truly grieved at the decision. She had passed whole days with her ladyship—she had found her an intelligent, charming companion—she had witnessed the privations she often underwent, in denying herself many articles of finery, luxury, and show, that she might clothe the naked, and feed the hungry. A great, a noble, and a feeling mind, was often, in her, seen struggling against folly and fashion, and her better feelings always gained the mastery. Oh! how would the warm and tender heart of Sophia have now sympathized with such a friend! How often did a secret thought arise in her bosom, which misplaced friendship made her instantly check, of—"Oh that Elinor had been such a female!" But this was not all: there seemed, at this present time, so strong a desire in Sophia to renew her acquaintance with lady Diana, as if her future fame and happiness were both concerned in it.

How

How prone are even the wisest heads to judge amiss, when prejudice sits paramount over reason and candour! Lady Ashton, "with spectacles on nose," sat long spelling over lady Diana's note. At length she handed it to Eliza, and said—"I don't know, Betsy, what you may think; but you know, as well as I do, how much my lady Boldface there was given to quizzing and hoaxing. I am sure she meant to insult us by this here note."

"Let me see, mamma," said Miss Ashton.

"Oh, my dear mother," said Sophia, "how can you see her ladyship's friendly offers in that light! I am sure, Eliza, you cannot find any thing insulting there."

Miss Ashton, however, without paying the least attention to her sister, commented on this instance of liberal-minded friendship in the following perverse manner—"*Her friendly respects to lady Ashton and family.*' — Nay, Sophia, whatever

whatever *friendship* her whimsical ladyship thought proper to shew to you, I am sure she had neither *friendship* nor *respect* for me or my mother; therefore let that prelude be set down to the chapter of quizzing.—'*Oppressed by sorrow herself.*' That is laughable; she never knew sorrow but by name. A blood-mare or a thorough-bred pointer would cure her sorrows better than any companions of her own sex or kind. *Sorrow* indeed!—she has not feeling sufficient to experience it for one half-hour."

"Oh, Eliza!" said Sophia, "how you wrong her!"

"Peace, child!" said Eliza, in her usual dictatorial manner.—'*She hopes that no fastidious ceremony, or pride*——'

"Ah, there!" interrupted lady Ashton—"now I call that downright *impertinence.* I will say, there never was a woman, raised up as I was, by your dear father, that, I believe, had ever less pride than

than myself—I can't abide pride; and as to Sophy, I wish, with all my heart, girl, you'd a had a little more."

"Yes, yes—but, mamma," said Miss Ashton, rather softened at this part of the note, "you would not let me finish—'*the pride of conscious rectitude.*'—That can be only quizzing, it is true; but that certainly is the best thing her ladyship has wrote here. But, however, I think, my dear mother, you have done very wisely in rejecting her visits altogether."

The little rosy Edgar Atheling was now brought in, to kiss the ladies before he went to bed; and his bewitching innocence, and lovely cherub countenance, seemed to restore to every one perfect good-humour.

When lady Diana received the note, she anxiously tore it open, and had not much difficulty in discovering the style of Miss Ashton in this (to her) most mortifying refusal. She resolved however to persevere. She found out that the Ash-

ton family generally took breakfast in a lovely little apartment, the glass door of which opened on a lawn, which was open to a path that led to some rich meadows on the left side of the chateau, and which belonged to the owner of a charming villa at some little distance. The glass door was shaded on each side by beautiful and full-blossoming bushes of the Provence rose, and Sophia had christened the apartment "Edgar's *bosquet de roses*."

A few mornings after the receipt of lady Diana's note, the sun had arisen, one day, with a warmth as ardent as on a summer's morning; the door of the saloon was thrown open, and little Edgar lay rolling on the velvet lawn, while Sophia was anxiously watching his every movement. She had that morning been enlarging the elastic clasps of his gold armlet, and it had slipped beneath his elbow. Suddenly the wicket, which separated the pathway from the dwelling, was thrown open, and a lady, in a dark riding-habit, rushed across the

the lawn, clasped the terrified boy to her bosom, and shrieking out—"My child! my child!" fainted away.

Every care was instantly exerted to bring her to herself; but what was the astonishment of the Ashtons on beholding, in the self-acknowledged mother of their mysterious little charge, lady Diana Wentworth!

CHAPTER X.

A new Character introduced.

The Torrington family were amongst those belonging to the higher classes who always made a very conspicuous figure in fashionable life. Lady Torrington, the wife of sir Edward Torrington, and mother to sir Lucius, was one of the most extraordinary belles of the last century. She was devoted to dress, to cards, routs, and balls; yet she was an indefatigable reader. Sometimes it was the Roman History—sometimes the History of England, that took up all her attention. She was determined to pick a name from the former for her eldest son, and he was accordingly christened Lucius.

The second son exactly resembled his mother

mother in person; therefore, as she had ever boasted her unmixed descent from the ancient Britons, she picked out for him the most romantic name, according to her ideas, that she could find in the History of England. This youngest boy, however he might be the idol of his mother, was certainly not the favourite of his father. His fine, noble spirit, sir Edward regarded as daring impudence; and seeing in him, at a very early age, an ardour for embracing a military life, he sent him forth to seek for honour, fame, and fortune, in the field of battle. He then made his will, leaving the bulk of his fortune to his son Lucius, with a very moderate portion to his youngest son.

The mother did not long survive the separation from a son whom she so tenderly loved, and whom she thought unjustly dealt with by his father. Sir Edward, who sincerely was attached to his wife, survived her but a few years, and Lu-

cius, his eldest son, succeeded to his large estates and title.

Sir Lucius Torrington, young, rich, and somewhat given to dissipation, was not such a slave to fashion as to suffer it to warp his mind from the principles of honour and justice. His friend, Edmund Ayscough, his fellow-collegian, whose mind and heart were yet more beautiful than his handsome person, encouraged, and almost brought to maturity, those seeds of virtue in his friend, which seemed planted in so rich a soil, and so likely to come to perfection. Ayscough, however, suddenly called to India on the death of his father, the gay and lively sir Lucius sunk into the vortex of fashionable life, and was known as the best judge of a horse—the best driver of a mail-coach, yet the patron of the elegant arts, and the most finished gentleman in London.

But never did the follies of the gay metropolis turn away his thoughts from his injured

injured brother's interests; he regularly corresponded with him—sent him handsome remittances, which the proud heart of his brother recoiled at receiving, and when opportunity offered, always sent back.—" No," lieutenant Torrington said, " he would win his fortune only by his sword, and by which alone he would make a passage to riches, fame, and honour." He gallantly distinguished himself in the East Indies, and was the bearer of dispatches home, highly recommended by his superior officers for a company, of which having, on his first application at headquarters, obtained, the affectionate and generous sir Lucius, in a fortnight after, purchased for him a majority in a respectable marching regiment, then under orders for the Cape of Good Hope.

Through the interest of powerful friends, major Torrington obtained leave of absence from his regiment for three months; at the end of which he took a passage in a vessel that was to touch at Madeira in her

way to the Cape. On board this ship was a nobleman, who was going to Madeira for a short time, for the benefit of his health. There was a certain fascination of manner in this passenger, though mixed with much native haughtiness, that rendered his conversation particularly pleasing to the noble-minded Torrington, who had certainly a little spice of his mother's Welsh pride in his composition. There was also a frankness about this nobleman that invited confidence, in so irresistible a degree, that the open heart of major Torrington, one wet day, that kept the noble passenger and himself prisoners in the cabin, poured forth its secrets in the bosom of his new-made friend. As the subject happened to turn on love, and the unsuspecting Torrington confided to his new friend, lord Albany, a passion that was successful, so far as it was mutual, but which was nevertheless likely to be attended with sorrow, and crossed by many difficulties, for some years to come, perhaps.—

haps.—"He therefore regarded," he said, "his temporary absence as rather a fortunate circumstance, in some respects, though it tore him from the idol of his heart's fondest affections," whom he did not scruple to name, on perceiving the very deep interest lord Albany appeared to take in his little narrative.

Two evenings after this fatal openheartedness in the unsuspecting and unconscious Torrington, an event happened, which plunged the two passengers, and the whole of the ship's company, into horror and consternation—the captain was found murdered in his cabin, with his throat dreadfully mangled. The crew was composed of men of tried probity and honesty, and the mate well known to have twice saved the life of the captain at the hazard of his own. He was, as may be supposed, invested with the command of the vessel, and the body of the unfortunate man committed to the deep. They were

expecting, every day, to come in sight of Madeira. The sailors were all separately examined concerning this affair: they had heard and witnessed the shocking incident with that heart-stricken horror which is experienced only by the feeling and upright; and their answers, when questioned, were such as might naturally be expected from conscious innocence, and not a sentence of prevarication was known to proceed from the lips of a single individual. They had long known their commander—they venerated and loved him.

On the third evening, the weather was uncommonly stormy for the latitude they had now attained: the two passengers in the cabin felt sick with the oppressive heat below, and, in spite of the tempest, they ascended the deck. Here the noble friend of major Torrington, after bestowing on him many contemptuous looks, began to utter sentences that were truly insulting, and which, at first, major Torrington was inclined

inclined to treat as mere *badinage;* but it growing too palpable that his fellow-passenger meant to affront him, Torrington said—"This is no place for me to give you the chastisement you merit; but, as soon as ever we touch the land, I challenge you to give me the satisfaction I claim, as a man of honour and a gentleman, though from an insulting scoundrel!"

The noble lord seemed not to pay any attention to this last degrading epithet, but roundly taxed major Torrington with the murder of the captain; and while the indignant youth started back with horror and surprise at such an accusation—while the storm increased, and death seemed staring in every face, and the brave sailors themselves seemed struck with terror, all intently occupied in their endeavours to save the ship, the atrocious wretch, while the man at the helm could attend to nothing but what he was about, seized the opportunity, and pushed his fellow-passenger overboard. Thus Torrington—the

handsome, the gallant, and interesting Torrington, sunk amidst the angry billows, and was seen no more.

It seems as if the measure of crimes committed by this monster must have been full by such an act; yet there is a withholding power, mighty to inflict, and as mighty to save.

Much as the sailors were engaged, they heard however the frighful plunge; and one cried out—"What was that?"

"Oh!" cried the villain Albany, "haste—haste—a rope—here—quick!—major Torrington has fallen overboard!"

A rope was thrown out; but the sea raged yet more dreadfully than before, and not a hand could be spared: this the cruel author of this disaster well knew, and seizing the rope, he threw it out himself; but, had he not taken care to elude all possible means of making it of service, he, as well as every one else, was convinced that it was impossible for the unhappy victim of his malevolence again to attain the ship, which

which was now darting along with fearful velocity, on a sea that ran mountains high.

Who can fathom the ways of Omnipotence? Ill-judging man reasons according to his own vain ideas, and, "stupid and ignorant as a brute," before Supremacy, dares to accuse Him of injustice, whose "ways are past finding out," and who, out of seeming evil, brings forth only good. Great Source of light, of life, of happiness eternal, of goodness, and of love! often are the motives of thy acts displayed, and explained to us, even in this life; but only then, when time shall be no more, and Thou shalt be all in all, will the great arcana be fully revealed, and the cause unfolded, why, often through a wretched and toilsome life,

> "———the good man's share
> Was gall and bitterness of soul."

The storm, as the night wore away, began to subside; the murderer had retired to his cabin—nay, he even slept, for conscience

science was not yet awakened: he felt, indeed, rather satisfied with himself for what he had done, and hugged himself that he had acted with so much precaution, during this most favourable opportunity, that it could never be found out.

By sunrise the tempest, which had been for some time subsiding, had now died away, and the joyful sound of land was heard from a sailor on the main-top. Madeira was in sight, and every voice hailed it as a happy haven from the troubles they had endured.

The cabin-boys had been too much engaged to clear out the cabin belonging to their late captain after his death. On removing the cot, a knife was found, with a very bad edge, and covered with blood; this was then the instrument that did the fatal deed, and accounted for the mangled state of the wound that had been inflicted, and which had, in a manner, sawn the windpipe. The mate and lord Albany now began to think he must have committed

mitted suicide, as whoever could have murdered him would not have been able to have been so long engaged in the sanguinary work. A silver plate on the knife was cleared from the blood about it, and the captain's name upon it proved it to have been his, which was known by every one of the ship's company, and by lord Albany himself, to be a clasp-knife which the deceased wore constantly in his pocket; they therefore all conjectured that the unhappy man had precipitated his own death; and the mate, with some reluctance, though neither with embarrassment nor hesitation, said, he knew that he was very jealous of his wife, which jealousy was increased by her refusing to comply with his request of accompanying him as far as Madeira.

Some scattered fragments of torn paper lay on the floor, but not a word could be found that was any way connected with the other, when they came to join the

scraps

scraps together, as there were several erasures, and other words were quite obscured by blood. The keys belonging to the deceased were in his writing-desk; a pen was in the inkhorn, though it had been thrown down; but as it was one of that ingenious kind which prevents the overflowing of the ink by being turned over, it might be discovered, they all remarked, that the deceased had been employed in writing just before he committed the rash act, and which opinion was confirmed from the writing-desk not being locked.

"As the keys are here," said lord Albany, "it can be no sacrilege, before we all write down our depositions as to what we know of this melancholy business, to look into the writing-desk; and then," added his lordship, "you can lock and seal it, in the presence of the second mate and myself."

This was accordingly done; and a strip of paper was found, with the following words,

words, written, seemingly, in tremulous agitation, but evidently and indisputably in the handwriting of the deceased:—

"MARY,

"Make yourself happy with him that you prefer to me, when I am no more. I am weary of life. Farewell for ever!"

The mate, who had known the captain almost from infancy, was now earnestly entreated to say if he believed that the unfortunate man had any cause for his jealousy. The mate declared firmly, that he believed he had not; and that the unhappy widow of the deceased was always a most faithful and truly-virtuous wife; that she was very handsome, but always loved her husband and her home, and was an industrious woman, and a careful and tender mother; that her late husband had

had become acquainted with an officer in the neighbourhood, whom he introduced to his wife, and at last became extremely jealous of—taxed her with regarding him with partiality, and this frequently occasioned words between them. The lady, however, never saw the gentleman except in the presence of a third person, and, in the end, very prudently, though somewhat rudely, it had been said, forbid him the house, carefully concealing her reasons. They had been married about five years, and had two lovely children; her being very far advanced in her pregnancy with a third, was the sole cause of her refusing to accompany her husband as far as Madeira, as there she would be left, perhaps in the most trying of all situations, amongst strangers.

After thanking the mate for his information, lord Albany said—"In order to clear these brave fellows from any kind of imputation, this paper must be carefully preserved; for it will prove a most valu-

able

able document for you, to your owners, and also before a court of justice: the whole truth must be there spoken; but to the afflicted widow it will be better to inform her that the captain died suddenly. Should she afterwards hear the worst, she will be more prepared for it; in her present situation it might be death to her and her unborn infant."

All this being approved of and agreed to, the several oaths of each individual were taken down in writing, and the effects belonging to the late unhappy commander of the vessel sealed up, in the presence of witnesses. Their excellent conduct, the untouched state of the captain's property, proved that every member of the ship's company were perfectly innocent of his death, and that it had been solely inflicted by his own rash hand.

We have been thus circumstantial in recording every particular of an incident which has but little to do with this history; we wished only to exculpate, as much

much as possible, the ignoble lord from the share he might be suspected to have had in this transaction, and to prove to our readers, that it was the unfortunate captain alone who perpetrated the desperate deed.

Now that lord Albany had for ever got rid of the poor injured Torrington, he had no wish to defame him, or to blacken his memory with the atrocious crime of murder; besides, he reflected that a contrary conduct would better serve to ward off all suspicion of his having been the author of the unhappy youth's premature fate. He therefore now heaved a hypocritical sigh, and affected to drop a tear to the fatal and untimely accident that had snatched so young and amiable a being from a world that he seemed born to ornament and improve.

His lordship's opinion was embraced, and coincided with, by all those who now listened to him, with delight, and thought him the best of men. They soon after arrived

rived in safety at Madeira, where, for a short time, they left their noble passenger —*truly noble*, in their estimation! and wishing him every blessing, they sailed, with a prosperous wind, to the Cape of Good Hope.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XI.

Extraordinary Behaviour.

THE widow of sir Edward Ashton, and her beautiful daughters, were left in the most profound astonishment at the conduct of lady Diana Wentworth; but they were yet more surprised, when her ladyship (after having the evening before embraced her child, as she called him, with that rapturous affection that a mother only can feel, and requested that she might leave him yet a short time under their protection) called, the next morning, perfectly cool—perfectly mistress of herself; and after some desultory conversation, without ever asking after, or wishing to see the child, she said—" She had always been accustomed to call the little

boy

boy her own, because he belonged to the dearest friend she had on earth, and that she had always felt happy by calling it hers, as it gave her a double claim to the sacred charge that had been invested in her by this dear friend, and whose name, at present, must remain a profound secret. She felt however peculiarly gratified at having it in her power totally to exculpate Miss Sophia Ashton from the slander that had dared to attack her spotless virtue, and which she should soon have the heartfelt satisfaction of clearing before her enemies, to their utter confusion."

Lady Ashton drew up her head with maternal pride, and regarded her Sophia with peculiar tenderness, while Miss Ashton held her sister in a close embrace, saying—" Oh, my dear mamma! I might be surprised yesterday at her ladyship's claim to the little Edgar, but I feel no surprise to find my sister innocent, for did I not always say she was so? All that ever I feared was, that this dear boy was the

child

child of the artful Elinor Hawthorn, that is now gone abroad, and for whom my dear sister has already suffered so much."

Sophia blushed like crimson, and hung down her head, with all the symptoms of conscious error.—"Ha!" exclaimed lady Diana, starting, and turning pale, as she looked at Sophia with her intelligent and piercing eyes, as if they would read her very soul; neither could her looks be averted by the very audible sigh of lady Ashton, as she cried out—"Ah! a nasty, good-for-nothing hussy!"

Lady Diana however made but a short visit; and when the smiling Edgar was brought in, she took but little notice of him; so that lady Ashton, and her daughter Sophia, really began to fancy that he was, as she had said, not her own child.—"Oh, mamma," said Miss Ashton, as soon as her ladyship was gone, "how easily did you suspect my dear unsullied sister! and how credulous are you now with respect to a female, who has ever preferred

the

the company and conversation of the other sex to her own—whose bold manners had become almost proverbial in the world of fashion! and yet, when she claims her child, with all the raptures of a fond mother, you believe it is not her child, because she repents having been betrayed into a confession which may for ever hurt her future fame; and therefore, as she denies it this morning, you take her merely on her word."

"My dear Eliza," said Sophia, "do not continue to cherish this rooted prejudice you have so long felt against lady Diana Wentworth. She is accomplished, good, and I will ever believe, till I really find her otherwise, truly virtuous. Besides, we both know that she scorns public opinion, that her mind is as independent as her fortune, and that she is accountable to no one, and resolved always to do as she pleases."

"I declare," said lady Ashton, "for my part, I never was over fond of lady Diana.

 She

She is much too bold, I think. I don't like ladies to be so fond of dogs and horses, and driving their own *phee*-atons; but really now it doesn't *sinnify*—I feel quite to love her; she has made me know that my dear Sophy is not the mother of this poor little babe. Come and kiss me, little boy, Edgar, for I doesn't now care one fig who's your papa."

Little Edgar put his hand before his face, and went, rather unwillingly, to pretty mamma's cross mamma, as the servants would sometimes call her in his presence, and gave her ladyship a very cool kiss. Sophia took the beautiful boy on her knee, and wept over him: nor were her tears entirely those of joy and gratitude; there was much contrition mingled with them: a painful recollection she could not conquer, and a sense of shame, rose predominant in her bosom, when she reflected on the necessity of confiding to lady Diana's private ear a secret, which her having hitherto concealed would place her

her own conduct in not the most favourable point of view.

On lady Diana Wentworth's return home, she wrote immediately to her cousin, the marquis of Rainsbury, telling him how truly sorry she was, that he had so unavailingly followed her from place to place; and that, if he really thought her worth the pursuit, she was ready instantly to bestow on him both her hand and heart: that he had long possessed the affection of the latter, and that she hoped he would never repent accepting of the former, so frankly offered: that she was going immediately to England; and her first visit, on her arrival there, would be to his uncle, the earl of Pyrwater, to whom she should become still more nearly related, by forming an union so long desired by their deceased parents.

The marquis was both surprised and gratified by this letter; but no delightful warmth glowed in his bosom, the feelings of which, as far as respected any of love

towards lady Diana, were not such as he thought every man on the point of marriage ought to experience. Sophia Ashton, arrayed in all her feminine graces—in all her irresistible loveliness, stood before his busy idea, as he clapped his hands over his eyes, and leaned on the table, on which lay the letter of his cousin, his own bride-elect. Never, perhaps, before, had Sophia obtruded herself on his anguished memory in a form half so captivating: as a contrast, the commanding form, and Minerva-like countenance, of lady Diana, swam before the vision of his aching mind's eye; fine, truly noble, was the contour of that countenance; an eye beaming with intelligence, but expressive of none of the softer passions: and while the dimpled smiles of a Hebe played, in constant good-humour, on the countenance of Sophia Ashton, arch satire alone gave mirth to the expression of his cousin's handsome mouth; and while her bright eyes laughed, they seemed also to reprove: even the late languid

state

state he had seen her reduced to had more in it of uneasy agitation than of delicate softness. He flattered himself now, however, and with some feelings of conscious pride, though devoted to another, that he himself had been the cause of this languor. Let not man exult over woman for her self-applause; for, how often may we cry out of the superior sex—" Oh vanity! vanity!"

The letter of lady Diana Wentworth must however be answered; and, therefore, feigning the transports he did not feel, lord Rainsbury immediately replied to the decisive writing, which, like that on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, seemed to mark, without recall, his future lot. Before he sealed his letter, he hastened to his uncle, the earl of Pyrwater, and shewed him the lady's letter, with his reply.

Nothing could equal the joy of the earl at this delightful news; he insisted, that the instant that lady Diana arrived, the marriage should take place.—" She is a skittish and a wilful young hussy," added

his lordship, "and must be taken at her word, otherwise she may be off again, and lead you another wild-goose chase." The marquis forced a smile, but his heart was heavy and ill-attuned to mirth.—"Come," resumed lord Pyrwater, "I see here is a space left, that, with all your vows of tenderness and protestations of gratitude, you could not find words to fill; and certainly it is all a business of commonplace nonsense, a foolish jargon, that people are compelled to use on such occasions. However, I will fill up the blank with a line or two from myself." The earl then wrote as follows:—

"MY CHARMING LADY DIANA,

"At length the most ardent wish of my life is about to be accomplished. Ten thousand thanks for the joy you have this day afforded to the bosom of him who will shortly bestow your hand on his grateful nephew. Delay not, I beseech your

your ladyship—delay not, for an instant, your setting out for England; but hasten to the protecting arms of an adoring husband, and the true heart's affections of a fond uncle. "PYRWATER."

Lady Diana implicitly obeyed the desire of the earl, engaged her passage for England, and then called to take her leave of the amiable inhabitants of Roselle. She found their society much enlivened by the arrival of Ayscough; and, taking advantage of his profound attention to the goddess of his idolatry, and the temporary absence of lady Ashton, she beckoned Sophia to follow her; and that young lady complied, with a palpitating heart and trembling step, till they came to an arbour at the end of a long shady walk, at the extremity of a flower-garden, where her ladyship, seating herself, gave way to an immoderate fit of laughter, which, though Sophia had left the house in a very de-

pressed state of mind, was so contagious, that she could not forbear smiling herself. Her ladyship then took from her *reticule* the letter she had received, in answer to her own, from lord Rainsbury and his uncle.

Then all the smiling loves and graces took their flight, and sadness cast a cloud over the sweet countenance of Sophia. She too well knew that Rainsbury was for ever lost to her; but the thought of his wedding another—and to see that woman whom he would so soon hail by the title of wife—to see her now triumphant before her, was more than she knew how to support. She made however one great and successful effort to master her feelings; and tenderly taking the hand of her ladyship, she said—"Oh, lady Diana, may you be happy!"

"Thank you, my sweet girl," said lady Diana; "and may every member of your family be as happy in their marriage as I in mine!"

Sophia heaved a soft sigh—"Ah, my lady!"

lady!" resumed she, "may I entreat of you to use your powers of persuasion with my sister, that she will no longer delay the happiness of the worthy Mr. Ayscough? To me, whom slander has so cruelly attacked, domestic felicity is for ever shut out."

"Oh, no, no!" said lady Diana, with an indifference that rather hurt Sophia—"not so bad, I hope, as that, neither—I shall clear your character as soon as possible; for, be assured, it is in my power—but there is a great deal to be done first. As to your proud and saucy sister, I should have been glad to have been called her friend; but she threw cold water on my advances, and I assure you Diana Wentworth's advances are not used to be rejected. Let Miss Ashton therefore be happy her own way; I shall not interfere with her marriage concerns. Let Ayscough make a fool of himself, if he chooses—he is already in purgatory; and you have heard, no doubt, my dear little girl, that

that matrimony is either a heaven, or *something else*, upon earth."

"Oh, lady Diana!" said Sophia, "you do not know my sister; think what she willingly endures for me, and then you will acknowledge that her noble mind bears some parity with your own, and that she is not unworthy those kind advances."

"Why," said lady Diana, "it was that very nobleness of conduct that made me endeavour to cultivate her friendship: had she continued the Miss Ashton I once knew her, I should have been glad to have declined even her acquaintance, much as she was estimated in the world of fashion. But come, my love," added her voluble ladyship, "time presses; I long to commence my trip to England, and bring my adventures to a conclusion, by declaring myself the wife of the most brave and handsome of human kind."

Sophia followed her ladyship in pensive silence.—"My dear lady Ashton," said lady Diana, as she entered the saloon, "I have

have a favour to ask of all this party here assembled, that will confer the greatest happiness on myself, and also on some others, who are very materially concerned in the request I am about to make."

"Indeed," said lady Ashton, "I think, lady Diana, from the promise you made me, that my dear Sophy's *repitation* should be quite *restablished*, we all ought to say, we are ready to comply with any thing that your ladyship may choose to ask; and therefore I hope," added lady Ashton, looking round on her family, "that I may, in all your names, say, that whatever lady Diana Wentworth's request may be, you will certainly *succeed* to it."

They all bowed assent, as they perfectly understood that lady Ashton meant, that they would accede to the wishes of lady Diana, who, first addressing Ayscough, said—"I know I am punishing you the most by this request; because I entreat of you not to lead Miss Ashton to the altar till

till you find I am married. I want to triumph over such a saucy beauty," added she, with a playfulness with which no one could be offended, "and be married before her, if it is only by one minute."—Miss Ashton smiled.—"And now," said lady Diana, "one more request—come not one of you to England till you receive a summons from me: I then invite you all to my wedding, not forgetting the little brat there." A smile and a tear now seemed striving for the mastery; the tear got the better, and the crystal drop fell on the lovely boy's cheek, as she fondly pressed him to her bosom, tenderly exclaiming—"Oh, Edgar, many are the pangs thou hast cost thy mother!" Then resuming all her wonted vivacity, she took Ayscough aside, and whispered him; he looked rapture inexpressible, and said—"That I will most joyfully comply with." Her next request, which indeed was almost a demand, was, that she must be allowed to choose

choose all their wedding-dresses. She then, with a light heart, leaped into her carriage, hastened to Havre de Grace, and sailed for England the following day.

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